HUNTING *for* the Word of GOD

The quest for the original text of the New Testament & the Quran in light of textual & historical criticism

SAMI AMERI

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Sami Ameri

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Transliteration

Arabic

ء	a’	ض	ḍ
ب	b	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	‘
ج	j	غ	gh
ح	ḥ	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	هـ	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	ṣ	ي	y

Greek

α	a	ο	o
β	b	π	p
γ	g	ρ	r
δ	d	σ ς	s
ε	e	τ	t
ζ	z	υ	u
η	ē	φ	f
θ	th	χ	ch
ι	i	ψ	ps
κ	k	ω	ō
λ	l		
μ	m		
ν	n		
ξ	x		

Hebrew

א	a	ס	s
ב	b	ע	ah
ג	g	ף פ	p
ד	d	ץ צ	ts
ה	h	ק	q
ו	o	ר	r
ז	z	שׂ	s
ח	ḥ	שׁ	sh
ט	ṭ	ת	t
י	y		
ך כ	k		
ל	l		
ם מ	m		
ן נ	n		

Arabic Vowels

◌َ	A	◌َا	Ā
◌ِ	I	◌ِي	Ī
◌ُ	U	◌ُو	Ū

Introduction

I only advise you of one [thing] - that you stand for Allah, [seeking truth] in pairs and individually, and then give thought.

— Qur'an, 34:46

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

— John 8:32 (New Testament)

Almost two decades ago, in my third year at the university, I found myself suddenly acquiring an interest in the field of Biblical studies. As far as can I remember, it all started with a book, in Arabic, called "*The Truth Revealed*," which I found one day as I was digging in an Islamic library looking for books on comparative Religion. As I came across a small shelf which only had a few books on it, most of which were thin tomes, I checked the titles and then chose one volume. I then went to the back of the library, where I had been sitting between two isles full of Islamic references. When I started reading, I was astonished; and the more I flipped the book's pages, the more my admiration of that wonderful book grew. Thus, it was that, "*The Truth Revealed*" served as the catalyst which led me to pursue studies about Christianity, and to consequently publish books on different Biblical issues.

What I most admired in the book was the chapter on the evidence of the corruption of the New Testament. The author pointed out dozens of examples where sentences or words of the text were added or deleted by later scribes. He reinforced his point of view with statements made by Christian scholars who acknowledged the impure state of the New Testament text. "*The Truth Revealed*" was an unprecedented study in the Muslim world.

From the time I read that book, I became more and more interested in studying the New Testament, especially the issue of text distortion. I have read almost all the serious Islamic books on this subject in Arabic, French, and English. After a while my research, made me feel an urgent need to analyze more and more works by non-Muslim authors and to go deeper in order to see things from a closer perspective.

Despite the fact that my admiration of "*The Truth Revealed*" did not fade away, my immersion in studying scholarly books and articles published in academic journal brought me to a shocking realization: that, Muslims, in their works, were trying hard to prove to Christian scholars something that these scholars themselves, did not deny, as if trying to prove to these scholars, liberals, conservatives and even apologists, that Muslim scholars were similar to them in thought. Realizing this, I wanted to shout out to my fellow Muslim scholars that it was past time for us to update our understanding of various Christian issues, such as the corruption of the scriptures. Unfortunately, I did not have a platform where I could make my urgent call, not only because I was not the head of an influential official institution, but, essentially, because there was no such platform in the Islamic world, or outside of it.

Muslims who are interested in interfaith dialogue with Christians for the purpose of guiding Christians to the way of salvation, need to know that the revolution of information and the long history of the constant development of methodologies and tools in religious studies in the West have created new understandings of Christianity markedly different from the old Middle-Age ones, even in the most conservative of circles.

I feel that the age-old Islamic challenge to prove that Christian Holy Scriptures are mired in corruption needs to be reconsidered, not, because it has failed to prove this fact, but, on the contrary, because, today, the distortion of the Christian texts is a universally acknowledged fact.

Stiff-necked apologists, such as Keith Small, *accuse* Muslims of claiming that all Christians believe that their Holy Books were perfectly preserved![1] And Daniel B. Wallace answers Bart Ehrman by a shocking statement: "I have never said in our debates that we are absolutely certain of the wording of the text of the New Testament. So, I would agree with him that "we really don't have any way to know for sure."![2]

The challenge concerning the preservation of the text of the New Testament changed dramatically from the Middle-Ages to the present day.

See Keith E. Small, *Holy Books Have a History*, Textual Histories of the New Testament and the 1 Qur'ān, Avant Ministries, 2010, p.ix

2 Daniel B. Wallace, *The Bart Ehrman Blog and the Reliability of the New Testament Text*, (http://danielbwallace.com/2012/05/01/the-bart-ehrman-blog-and-the-reliability-of-the-new-testament-text/)

Today, we no longer discuss whether or not it is accurate to mention that Christians distorted their holy books, rather, the challenge is whether Christians have restored their books after they were distorted. Or, in other words, the pertinent question now, is, "Can we really reconstruct the lost Original Text of the New Testament?"

The term "lost" preceding "original text" is not related to the loss of the virtual books written by the authors. Nor does it mean that the text we have today is devoid of any similarity with the authentic one. We only mean that "lost" indicates that we have lost confidence and certitude that any passage in the New Testament is truly authentic.

Those who believe that the text of the New Testament is now considered lost, think that the text printed and found today in bookstores and libraries or anywhere else includes some unauthentic or dubious clauses most probably added by later scribes as proven through the scientific research of the oldest and best manuscripts and other changes, the insertion of which, cannot be proved, in the copies produced throughout the history of the transmission of the New Testament. The first genre is an obviously bogus text, while the second one, the authenticity of which countless Christians defend, is proof that there is, indeed, a "lost" original, because the Christian tradition has failed to offer rock solid proof of its originality. It is, undoubtedly an old, nay, a very old text, but there is no evidence to back up the claim that it was penned by the original authors. So, the claim that I make herewith is that we have lost that text because we cannot palpably see the fingerprint of the "original earliest scribe."

Therefore, the challenge is no longer to prove the existence of the fingerprint of unfaithful scribes, rather it is to prove the existence of the fingerprint of the original authors. We all, Muslims and Christians, can see the apparent marks of the unreliable scribes, but we debate those of the composers.

If the conclusion is reached that the original text is unrecoverable, this means that Bibliocentric believers can no longer put their faith in the so-called *Word of God* as upheld by the Church, or in the view of Jesus, as the crucified savior, as portrayed in Church scriptures.

This is the conclusion that I will show in this book.

Conversely, the authenticity of the Qur'ānic text is being challenged today from different angles. The historical narrations and the extant manuscripts are the main sources of the views that argue for the corruption of

the text. To be fair with the Christian apologists' camp, I did not work on a distinct subjective collection of Christian objections, rather I preferred quoting the objections of a well respected Christian scholar in Christian -missionary and academic- circles who discusses the most updated studies made, whose ignoble purpose appears only to prove that the Qur'ānic text has been distorted and that the history of the New Testament books, as detailed in a PhD dissertation made by the same author, is superior. This author is considered today, the most important scholar in this field, even though his studies were published only a few years ago.

The present book is not written by a *neutral* author, but, rather, by an *objective* researcher. A neutral author does not incline to any particular view and does not strive to prove a certain theory. An objective researcher, however, is interested in guiding his human fellows to enlightenment and truth. I do not hide my religious affiliation, but I have committed myself to portraying the factual situation of the history of the Christian and Muslim scriptures, and to present the Christian arguments for the existence of the original text of the New Testament as displayed by the apologists or other scholars who share, with them, the same claim. Moreover, I have not used any argument or any statement from the Muslim camp in the first half of the book, when discussing what is an evident loss of the words of the authors of the New Testament. The proof of my objectivity is that, when I discuss the history of the Qur'anic text, I only use arguments accepted by the majority of both Muslim and non-Muslim academic scholars.

In no way is it my intention to merely excite, in the manner of recent popular books that declare that Jesus lived in France, travelled to India, or was a womanizer. This book is meant to research a paramount issue that needs to be discussed outside of theological institutes as well as inside of them, to speak to ordinary people and allow the "believer" to cast a more discerning eye on the "reality" of his belief.

Despite the clear focus of the topic, it is a challenge to reach its entire target audience, because this audience consists of both scholars and lay readers. Some previous textual knowledge is required in order to clearly understand the details and analyze the subject matter. To assist in reaching all members of my audience, I have made my best attempt to make unpopular and unfamiliar information easy to grasp. Regardless of the reader's background, the following points are vital signposts that will help him or her to better comprehend the main themes, methods, and conclusions in this book.

✓ This book is not intended to offend church members, but rather to open the possibility of another way of thinking. It discusses the authenticity of the texts of the New Testament only through evidence agreed upon by the majority of scholars, whatever their affiliation may be.

✓ Since this book refers to the New Testament's "original text," definitions thereof will be based on latest studies in textual criticism (the science that aims to remove the transcription errors occurring in the texts of manuscripts[3]).

✓ The main premise of this book is that the original copy of the New Testament has disappeared. This premise has been commonly agreed upon. In addition, scholars who believe that it is possible to reconstruct the original text depend on three tools to accomplish the task:

1. The Greek manuscripts (handwritten documents) of the New Testament
2. The various versions of the New Testament
3. The citations of the Fathers of the Church.

They then proceed to recompose the original text based on the pre-adopted textual criticism method. My primary disagreement with these scholars is not about the aforementioned method, but with the *results* which they *may* reach.

✓ Since the book will discuss the issue of the original text, the modern translation will not be discussed, only the Greek text. I have included English translations for every Greek text to facilitate the reader's understanding.

✓ Quotations from the New Testament will be from the famous traditional version, the King James Version, since this critical study is mainly directed to conservative readers.

✓ To prevent any accusations that the author is subjective and relying on weak theories, many authorities in the discipline of textual criticism will be quoted. Most of these authorities are respected scholars, even by conservative theological seminary standards.

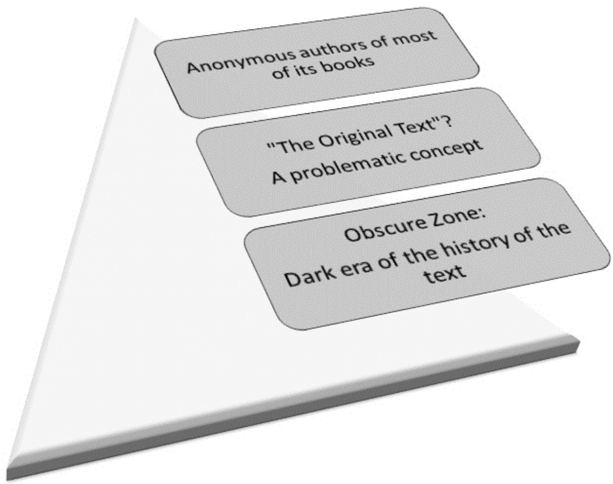
3 This is a "basic" definition of the term. The debate about identifying the goals of this discipline will be discussed later.

6

A Preserved New Testament?

- What is the "original text"?
- What is the "obscure Zone"?
- Can we talk about a systematic preservation of the New Testament?
- Can the three witnesses lead us to the original text?
- Did the recovered text harm the Christians' claims?

The History of the N.T. text



Restoration of the *Original Text*: A Mere Deceptive Claim

As to the New Testament, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of every thousand, we have the very word of the original.

— Emery H. Bancroft, *Christian Theology*, pp. 39-40

It may not be appropriate for an author to begin a book with the conclusion, or to jump to the terminus of the journey right from the start, but our subject matter here may call for an exception to this convention. Christian apologists, in their generous optimism, are claiming that the restoration of the original text of the New Testament is now a *fact*.[1] As a result, prevalent Church rhetoric refers to the printed text of the Holy Book as *the exact word of God*; there is an absolute certitude that every text in the traditional King James Version or the New International Version (the translation most widely used by Americans), or in any other old or modern Bible, is the true word of the authors of the New Testament. So, let us start our journey from the end.

Backed up by solid evidence, the author can declare firmly and confidently that there is no guarantee that what we read now in the printed New Testament has indeed come from the pens of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude, who are nevertheless nearly always cited as the authors of the New Testament books.

The Arrogance of Textual Criticism

There is no doubt that the discipline of textual criticism has offered researchers many benefits, clarified many mysteries, and cleared the murkiness of many issues related to the text of the New Testament. However, these developments themselves have resulted in what I choose to call an inflated arrogance within those who practice this discipline—just as has occurred in every branch of science once it has achieved some noticeable advancement. This is a human trait whose origin is human beings' pride in their own achievements and their tendency to rid themselves of the constraints of reality in their desire to reach far-off or impossible ends.

1 See Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent In The Light of the Cross*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002, pp.237-41

The discovery of many manuscripts and the evolution of research methods related to the origin of manuscripts, versions, and the Church Fathers' citations have led textual critics to believe that textual criticism is capable of actually deriving the original text of the New Testament. They have extended this belief to allow the assertion that the classical goal of textual criticism, "to restore the original text," has actually been achieved. In fact, this is a simplistic view that fails to grasp the difficulties of the issue, and a purely emotional one, although it attempts to cloak itself in science. Textual criticism is a discipline that is directly dependent on whatever written texts of the New Testament are available, in order to extract from them a (better) text. Therefore, abstract study is not its forte, because it is a discipline intimately linked to direct physical details that govern its course and its deductions. (Textual criticism is not the same as *higher criticism*, a science that aims to discover the literary form of the text, its author, the date and place of its composition, the method of its composition, its integrity, and the later editing of it. Higher criticism moves in a larger circle and deals with broader data, and although its results are less precise and less specific, it tends to provide more general inferences and offer conclusions within wide temporal and spatial margins.)

Textual criticism today has come to the conclusion that the simplistic study previously practiced in analyzing problems and demanding solutions needs radical revision. Today the whole discipline appears to be slipping away from its classical goal and is in need of rediscovering its substantial essence. In a summary of the current situation regarding the classical goal of textual criticism as being the restoration of the original text of the New Testament, Michael W. Holmes declared that the target of traditional textual criticism should be reconsidered because of its inadequacy or deficiency in at least two major respects: First, many scholars consider that the study of the history of the transmission of the text should be shifted from being a mere means to reach the original text, to a legitimate goal in its own right. Consequently, the variants of the text as they appear through the living history of the scripture should be taken seriously as a window to the individuals and communities that transmitted them. Second, the term "original text" as a goal of New Testament textual criticism is inherently ambiguous and therefore subject to the serious question of whether it can or ought to be a goal.[2]

2 See Michael W. Holmes, "*From 'Original Text' to 'Initial Text': the Traditional Goal of New*

Eldon Epp, the most influential scholar in the most recent decades of New Testament textual criticism, elucidates in his sound article, "The Multivalence of the Term 'Original Text," how naïve our understanding of the term "original text"[3] has been, and how complex and hard to grasp is its meaning. He skillfully deconstructs the notion of "original text," showing how deep and tangled is this seemingly simple term. He makes us confront this multi-faceted problem by delving deeply into the near-geological history of decades and centuries of scholarly works and attempts to solve the textual problems of the New Testament. He states that the issue of "original text" is more complex than the issue of canon, because the former includes questions of both canon and authority. It is more complex than possessing Greek gospels when Jesus spoke primarily Aramaic, because the transmission of traditions in different languages and their translation from one to another are relevant factors in what is "original." It is more complex than matters of oral tradition and form criticism, because "original text" encompasses aspects of

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Testament Textual Criticism in Contemporary Discussion."

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cnes/news/Holmes%20From%20Original%20Text%20to%20Initial%20Text%20U%20of%20M%20version%201%20Feb%202011-1.pdf, (3/6/2011)

3 Ironically, the *passe-partout* apologist James R. White, who immersed himself in "scholarly" (!) debates with almost everybody, writes, "Over the past fifteen years or so a movement has come into prominence, championed by scholars like D. C. Parker, Bart Ehrman, and even Eldon Epp, that questions the wisdom of even speaking about the 'original text' and attempts to shift focus from the classical goal of all textual critical study (the restoration and verification of original readings) to an exegesis of the variants themselves. These scholars insist that 'every manuscript has a story to tell' and that they can determine this story by discerning a pattern of purposeful scribal emendation. This represents a radical departure from long-held standards and is deeply troubling." (White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?*, second edition, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009, pp.193-94). This is a bad résumé of (1) the state of this movement, (2) its message, (3) goal, and (4) leaders.

It is really bizarre to include Ehrman in the list of the leaders of this movement. While we know that he does not have a clear opinion about this matter, he just alludes to the problem in few paragraphs scattered in his books and articles. Even some scholars have accused him of holding a position and its opposite in this subject, and we all did read that he said in his misquoting (p.210): "A number of scholars […] have even given up thinking that it makes sense to talk about the 'original' text. I personally think that opinion may be going too far […]. So at least it is not 'non'-sense to talk about an original text." I think it is a type of "Ehrmanophobia" that has spread in the apologist circles! (It is only while the book you are reading is being edited that we finally had a clear vision about Ehrman's view, in his debate with Daniel B. Wallace, whose topic is "Is the original New Testament lost?" Ehrman denied in it the possible fidelity to the original text.) But what is worse is the phrase "and even Eldon Epp," when actually Epp is the head of this movement!

the formation and transmission of pre-literary New Testament tradition. It is more complex than the Synoptic problem and other questions of compositional stages within and behind the New Testament, because such matters affect definitions of authorship, and of the origin and unity of writings. More directly, it is more complex than making a textual decision in a variation unit containing multiple readings when no "original" is readily discernible, because the issue is broader and richer than merely choosing a single "original" and even allows making no choice at all. Finally, what "original text" signifies is more complex than Hermann von Soden's, or Westcott-Hort's, or any other system of text types, or B. H. Streeter's theory of local texts, or various current text-critical methodologies, including the criteria for originality of readings, or "rigorous" versus "reasoned" eclecticisms, or claims of theological tendencies or ideological alterations of readings and manuscripts, because *the question of "original text" encompasses all of these and much more.*[4]

Epp takes us on a whirlwind tour of the stories of our failure to provide reasonable answers for the New Testament puzzles, and then makes an urgent call for us to be painstakingly realistic and to explore just how deep the riddle of the concept of an "original text" is. He has meticulously disassociated the discipline from the immature, enthusiastic, and theological motives of its pioneers.

Scholars in earlier centuries dealt with the concept of original text with an indefensible simplicity, a rather artless way of perceiving and analyzing sophisticated entities. The concept of original text when studied in early Christian history should be seen as a long-term goal that cannot be achieved unless all of the taxing questions surrounding it have been cogently answered. The realistic view of the emerging of the canonical texts and their early transmission should make us acknowledge that the concrete tools we possess are not sufficient or effective enough to surpass the obstacles of the first centuries that block the path to the text in its initial state. We should learn from the scholars' failure to solve the subsidiary difficulties that there is no chance today to succeed in unraveling the awkward problem.

We need to realize that we are facing problems that are complex and deep-seated within the discipline, and that the bridge between textual

4 Eldon J. Epp, "The Multivalence of the Term 'Original Text' in New Testament Textual Criticism," in *Harvard Theological Review*, 1999, Volume 92, No. 3, pp.246-47

criticism and its classical goal has been severed. Such an appalling fact should help us to better realize how lengthy and tiresome our journey is, and how weak and cloudy our vision has been. Accurately scrutinizing the problem will help not only in reframing the goal of our textual studies, but will also serve to establish a new starting point. Epp concludes his article by urging a break with the past and the shedding of whatever remains of the innocence of New Testament textual criticism. Reality and maturity, as he says, should make us see how the term "original" has exploded into a complex and highly unmanageable multivalent entity.[5] Ultimately, in this *post*-modern age, we need to face the real dilemma of the *subject* and *method*. This same idea, although less maturely framed, was put forth a century ago by Conybeare at the beginning of the twentieth century, "the ultimate (New Testament) text, if there ever was one that deserves to be so called, is *for ever irrecoverable.*"[6]

This statement did not make an impression at that point in time; it was overshadowed by the enthusiasm and momentum which resulted from the recovery and scholarly study of numerous old manuscripts (papyri, early Syriac manuscripts…) and the early beginnings of what was becoming a foundation of more elaborate textual methods. Robert M. Grant was clearer and more precise on the aim of restoring the original text of the New Testament when he said, "To achieve this goal is *well-nigh impossible*. Therefore we must be content with what Reinhold Niebuhr and others have called, in other contexts, an "*impossible possibility,*"[7] and he clarified his point by commenting that we now live in "a time when *it is generally recognized that the original text of the Bible cannot be recovered, unless by some lucky chance a New Testament autograph might come from the sands of Egypt.*"[8] The term "original text" is transformed in the light of the newest methodological evolution from a goal to a seductive mirage that disappears when we get close to it. Carl P. Cosaert admits that this term is complex and

5 Ibid., p. 280

6 Fredrick C. Conybeare, *History of New Testament Criticism*, London; New York: G. P. Putnam,1910, p.168 [italics mine].

7 Robert Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, New York: Harper & Row, 1963, p.51

8 Robert Grant, "The Bible of Theophilus of Antioch," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol.66, No. 2 (Jun., 1947), p.173 [italics mine].

phantomlike in essence, which is why he proclaimed that "the meaning of the phrase 'original text' has become problematic, so its use here deserves some qualification. […] the term refers to the reading that is most likely representative of the oldest reading available from the extant evidence—regardless of whether it dates back to a single 'original' autograph or *an early correction that became dominant*."[9]

The discipline of textual criticism is reaching the first phases of its maturity in our era, and it starts—under the leadership of pragmatic scholars and with more developed methods—to differentiate between mere pleasant wishes and attainable goals. Therefore, we can read at present about constructing a new goal after deconstructing the old one.

It is again Eldon Epp who fashioned the cornerstone of the discipline into its new shape by stating in a revolutionary article that the unitary goal of textual criticism is "establishing the earliest attainable text."[10] The same determination was made by another important scholar, Reuben Swanson, who declared firmly that *the old fixed goal is a delusion, fictional, mythical, and impossible.* He based his conclusion on two facts: "(1) we possess only fragments of copies of the autographs from any period earlier than 350 A.D., none of which may preserve "the original pure text" and (2) any "final judgment" between readings "can only be subjective," inasmuch as "each of us comes to the task with our own agenda conditioned by our background, training, and theological bent."[11] (I think, that we have to agree with the statement made by Eldon Jay Epp, in his essay "The Eclectic Method in New Testament Textual Criticism: Solution or Symptom?" that the most accepted textual critic method, that is eclecticism, is in fact symptomatic of the deep deficiency of the discipline, which is the lack of objective criteria to reach the "original" readings.) Those two reasons drove Swanson to reject textual criticism itself, with critical judgment to be replaced by *reportage*.[12]

9 Carl P. Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels in Clement of Alexandria*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008, pp.278-79 [italics mine].

10 Eldon J. Epp, "It's All about Variants: A Variant-Conscious Approach to New Testament Textual Criticism," in *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007), p.308

11 Reuben J. Swanson, ed., *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines against Codex Vaticanus: Romans*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House; and Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2001, p.xxvi

12 See Michael W. Holmes, "From 'Original Text' to 'Initial Text.'"

The *Obscure Zone* and the Failure of Textual Criticism

Christian apologists intentionally skip over a crucial truth that undermines their whole work, which is that, as Colwell stated, "Without a knowledge of the history of the text, the original reading cannot be established."[13] We should review the history of the text which can lead us back to its starting point and thus to the autograph.[14]

Today, we are in absolute ignorance about the early history of the text: the authors, the date of composition, the early receivers, and the early circulation. We have no certitude about the exact details of the emergence of the early translations, e.g. the Old Latin[15], the Old Syriac[16], and this ignorance is the stumbling block that keeps us away from the original text.

The problem of finding the autographs of the New Testament books is that much more grave and disheartening when we know that the disappearance of the originals "is readily understood when we consider that *the greater portion of the New Testament, viz. the Epistles, are occasional writings never intended for publication, while others were meant to have only a limited circulation.*"[17] These attributes may rule out any chance to get to the autographs, or the very early copies before their contamination by the scribes' own ideas and views. The preserved copies cannot reflect the virgin status of the text.

13 Ernest C. Colwell, "The Greek New Testament with a Limited Critical Apparatus: Its Nature and Uses," in Allen Paul Wikgren and David Edward Aune, eds., *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian*, Netherlands: Brill Archive, 1972, p.37

14 For the purpose of clarification, the problematic terms "original text" and "autograph" will be used in this book as synonyms, meaning the text written by the author.

15 See Robert Casey, "The Patristic Evidence for the Text of the New Testament," in Merril M. Parvis and Allen Paul Wikgren, eds. *New Testament Manuscripts Studies, the materials and the making of a critical apparatus*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950, p.76

16 See Sebastian Brock, "The Use of the Syriac Fathers for New Testament Textual Criticism," in Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes, eds. *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research, Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995, p.230

17 Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament*, tr. William Edie. Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1901, p. 29 [italics mine]. Daniel B. Wallace alluded to 2Thessalonians 3:17, where Paul refers to "every letter" that he has written to churches. Yet, only Galatians (assuming the South Galatian theory) and 1Thessalonians are prior to 2Thessalonians in the corpus Paulinum! This indicates that many of Paul's letters disappeared. (Wallace, *Did the Original New Testament Manuscripts Still Exist in the Second Century?* http://bible.org/article/did-original-new-testament-manuscripts-still-exist-second-century-0 (12/4/2011))

Christian apologists did not lose hope in giving a simple version of the history of the text. Robert Price summed up their methodology, breaking up the history of the text block, by saying, "one posits some scenario that would make accurate transmission of gospel materials possible and then adopts it as if its convenience for apologetic made it true."[18] It is as simple and naïve as that. We can detect nothing in the apologists' literature that can offer any positive argument for a fixed status of the text starting from its day of composition. There are only flimsy theories and very general and fuzzy ideas, with no details or precise factual proofs.

The earliest and little-known phases of the text (starting from the end of the second century) reflect clearly the larger absence of the original text. William L. Petersen asks if "the original text" of the Gospel of Mark is what is found in our fourth century and later manuscripts, or if it is, rather, the "Mark" recovered from the so-called "minor agreements" between Matthew and Luke. He answered by stating, "It *is clear that, without even having to consider individual* variants, determining which "Mark" is "original" is a difficult- and *perhaps even impossible - task.*"[19]

He added that among other problems that made the "original text" out of our reach is the large number of diverse witnesses (Greek manuscripts, versions, and Church Fathers' citations), which poses a problem well-known for centuries. This drove Richard Bentley in 1720 to suggest abandoning the search for a text that was "as close as possible to the original," and instead to be content with an edition of the Greek New Testament exactly as it was in the best exemplar at the time of the Council of Nicaea.[20]

Petersen affirmed that the modern critical editions, which are based on a large number of witnesses, are still far from the "Autograph . . . To be brutally frank, *we know next to nothing about the shape of the 'autograph' gospels*; indeed, it is questionable if one can even speak of such a thing. [...] the text in our critical editions today is actually a text which dates from no

18 Robert M. Price, *Review: J. Ed. Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, Reinventing Jesus: What The Da Vinci Code and other Novel Speculations Don't Tell You,* Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006

http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/reviews/reinventing_jesus.htm (3/26/2011)

19 William L. Petersen, "What Text Can New Testament Textual Criticism Ultimately Reach," in Barbara Aland and Joel Delobel, eds., *New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis, and Early Church History, A Discussion of Methods*, Netherlands: Peeters Publishers, 1994, p. 137 [italics mine].

20 Ibid., p. 137

earlier tha[n] about 180 CE, at the earliest. *Our critical editions do not present us with the text that was current in 150, 120 or 100—much less in 80 CE.*"[21]

I think it would be more accurate to say that scholars have not yet reached that late text; they are still only working on it. This tragic darkness of the early decades of the history of the text made the well-known scholar Helmut Koester propose, concerning the second Gospel, that "one can be fairly certain that *only its revised text has achieved canonical status*."[22]

All the preceding developments in the field of textual criticism have taken many scholars away from the myopic concern of getting to the autograph, and made that aim a religious concern for the people of the church, who do not accept anything less than *surety*.

Escaping the *Obscure Zone*

The Christian apologists counteract the utter obscurity surrounding the first phase of the promulgation of the New Testament, which includes the factors of (1) authorship, (2) revision, (3) distribution, (4) and proliferation, with an argument that they wish would appear historically valid. And yet it is, in fact, just an emotional plea, disconnected from the real objections and disregarding the reality of the religious movement of that period, stating that we have manuscripts of the second, third, and fourth centuries that are in agreement in validating the core of the text and that negate the possibility of any radical change of the original form of these books. The response to the apologists is that they ignore a number of important, obtrusive facts:

1. The issue here is not *radical* change, but change/distortion in and of itself, which would deny the text its stability, its robustness, and its freedom from change.
2. There are no traces of *the mo*st important Church doctrines in the Gospels—such as the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, and Original Sin—so these Gospels, to start with, are not arguments in favor of the theological structure of the Church, as its defenders would argue.

21 See William. L. Petersen, "The Genesis of the Gospels," in A. Denaux, ed. *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis*, BETL 161, Leuven: Peeters and University of Leuven Press, 2002, p.62 [italics mine].

22 Helmut Koester, *From Jesus to the Gospels: interpreting the New Testament in its context*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, p.52 [italics mine].

3. We have only two papyri (manuscripts made of the papyrus plant) dating back to the second century. The very tiny texts they cover do not constitute an argument for a unique, stable form of the New Testament.
4. Most of the so-called "Christian heretics" stemmed from the first century or the beginning of the second century, as doctrines, not necessarily religious groups (Unitarianism, Docetism, adoptionism), and that historical fact proves that the radical divergences in viewing Jesus and interpreting his message coexisted with the emergence of the four Gospels.

The apologist allegation is based on the claim that, since the text of the New Testament was not radically changed in the first centuries after Christ, starting from the second half of the second century, we have to infer that the stability of the text was the rule in the century before that. The problem with this claim is that, first, it is not based on direct fact or impressive early evidence. Second, it ignores the drastic differences between the transmission of a text not yet canonized, circulating among small group of believers, and the distribution of a canonized text in an era where the communities of the believers are growing faster. Third, it ignores the existence of different text-types from the earliest known phase of the transmission of the New Testament text. Therefore, we know that the obscure zone of the history of the text was not as elaborate as the apologists' claims make it out to be.

Spotlights in the *Obscure Zone*

When Christian apologists are forced to face the dilemma of the *obscure zone,* they tend to run away from this challenge by asking their counterpart for positive arguments that prove the corruptions of the scriptures in that period.

What these apologists offer is not an effective answer, because the *obscure zone* prevents them from making a positive argument for the preservation of the scriptures, so if they claim that a positive argument for the corruption of the New testament has not been offered, it is easy to conclude that they do not have the positive argument for the preservation of the New Testament in that gloomy period. Unlike the Christian apologists, we have positive proof that in the *obscure zone*, the New Testament was altered. The major signs of a huge wave of corruptions occurring in the *obscure zone* are as follows:

1. The Text Itself as a Witness

Philip W. Comfort, the most famous Christian[23] scholar, in claiming that we can restore the original text of the New Testament, stated that we can talk of two categories of texts in the New Testament. The first category consists of the texts that kept the same shape from their initial time (the autograph), and the second consists of texts that passed two phases: 1) the composition, the edition, then the distribution, and 2) the re-edition, then the distribution. And he cited as examples for the second category the twenty-first chapter of the fourth Gospel, the Acts of Apostles that was published in two different versions, one by Luke and another longer version edited by another editor, and the Pauline Epistles (minus the Pastoral Epistles.)[24]

Comfort did not use extant scriptures to prove his classification, but he used inclusively the philological studies which proved that, for some of the books of the New Testament, it is impossible to speak of a sole author, and it is very well known that it is almost unanimously agreed that the last chapter of John was added by another author(s). [25] Parker proclaimed that "the final chapter has every sign of being a later addition to the Gospel. That its twentieth chapter is enough on its own, and that 20.30-1 provide an excellent conclusion, has long been widely agreed."[26]

What Comfort declared is the same thing we want to prove: the New Testament was corrupted in the *obscure zone* by unknown authors who added verses or chapters and extended or abridged the text. We do not have

23 He is a devoted Christian who believes sincerely that the Bible, the Old and the New Testaments, is the word of God. He said in his book "*The Complete Guide to Bible Versions*" (Wheaton, I: Living Book, 1991, p.3): "Of all the millions of books there are in the world, there is only one that was authored by God. And there is only one book that reveals God's plan for man. It is an amazing book because it has a divine author and because it tells the wonderful story of God's love for us."

24 See Philip W. Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992, pp.19-20

25 Father Raymond Brown started his comment on the twenty-first chapter by saying, "From textual evidence, including that of such early witnesses as P66 and Tertullian, the Gospel was never circulated without ch. 21. (A fifth-or sixth-century Syriac ms. [British Museum cat. add. no. 14453] that ends with John 20/25 has apparently lost the final folios.) This still leaves us with two basic questions. First, was ch. 21 part of the original plan of the Gospel? Second, if not, was it added before "publication" by the evangelist or by a redactor? With Lagrange and Hoskyns as notable exceptions, few modern scholars give an affirmative answer to the first question. (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, New York: Doubleday, 1970, 1077-78).

26 David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.177

scriptural proof, but we have clear philological proofs coming from the text itself.

Any serious study about the books of the New Testament will lead to the conclusion that many of these books were the result of the work of more than one author. We can notice inconsistent ideas in the same book, or apparent non-justified shifts that broke the flow of the narration, that is, different signs for later additions or changes in the text. Here are some examples.

The Gospel of Matthew. The attempt to clarify the attitude of the first Gospel towards the Law of Moses will reveal two sharply contradictory views. The first insists that Jesus' mission did not break with Mosaic Law; but rather held tightly to its commandments. The second view portrays the mission of Jesus as a revocation of the Law of Moses.[27]

Pro-Law:

- The fundamental affirmation of the Law (cf. Matthew 5:17-20; 23:3a, 23b).
- The sustained reference to the Old Testament and the emphatic application of the idea of fulfillment of the law (cf. e.g. Matthew 1:22-23; 2:5-6, 15:17-18; 3:3; 4:4-16; 8:17 and others).
- The fundamental limitation of Jesus' mission to Israel (cf. Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24).
- The Matthean community still keeps the Sabbath (cf. Matthew 24:20).
- The Matthean community still lives within the jurisdiction of Judaism (cf. Matthew 17:24-27; 23:1-3).
- The Moses typology in Matthew 2:13ff.; 4:1-2; 5:1 and the five great discourses in the Gospel present Jesus as having an affinity to Moses.
- The language, structure, reception of the Scripture, argumentation, and history of the influence of the Gospel of Matthew point to a Jewish Christian as its author.

Against the Law:

- The Gospel's offer of salvation to all clearly points to a Gentile mission that has been underway for some time (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; 8:11-12; 10:18; 12:18, 21; 13:38a; 21:43-45; 22:1-14; 24:14; 25:32; 26:13).
- The nullification of ritual laws (cf. Matthew 15:11, 20b; 23:25-26).

27 The coming points are taken from Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p. 220-1

- The Matthean critique of the Law. Especially in the Antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48), Jesus places his own authority higher than that of Moses, for which there is no parallel in ancient Judaism.
- Matthew presents a thoroughgoing polemic against Pharisaic casuistry (cf. Matt 5.20; 6:1ff.; 9:9ff.; 12:1ff., 9ff.; 15:1ff.; 19:1ff.; 23:1ff.)
- Matthew avoids Aramaisms (cf. Mark 1:13/ Matthew 4:2; Mark 5:41/ Matt 9:25; Mark 7:34/ Matthew 15:30; Mark 7:11/ Matthew 15:5).
- The Matthean community understands its life to be at some distance from that of the synagogue (cf. Matthew 23.34b ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς ὑμῶν [in your synagogues]; Matt 7.29b καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς αὐτων [and not as their scribes]).
- Ritual prescriptions for the Sabbath have lost their significance (cf. Matthew 12.1-8).
- The rejection of Israel, i.e. that Israel has lost its distinct place in the history of salvation, has been accepted by Matthew as reality for some time (cf. Matthew 21:43; 22:9; 8:11-12; 21:39ff.; 27.25; 28:15).

It is really hard to believe that these two opposite views about a central Christian tenet were written down by the pen of a single author. And on what basis do we make a choice about the background of the author, gentile or Jew, though many scholars do?[28] It is more plausible to argue that the theological aspect of a primitive text was melded with paradoxical views at the hand of a later scribe(s) or community who held totally different views about the inherited Jewish Law.

The Gospel of John. The text of the Fourth Gospel bears fingerprints of varying, non-homogenous ideas and numerous indications of rupture in the narratives and discourses.[29] Father Raymond E. Brown, a worldwide authority on the Johannine literature, posits five stages in the composition of the Gospel. Stage 1: The existence of a body of oral tradition independent of the Synoptic tradition. Stage 2: Over a period lasting perhaps several

28 For a Jewish Christian author, see for example Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, pp.79-80; Roloff, "Das Kirchenverständnis des Matthäus im Spiegel seiner Gleichnisse," in *NTS* 38 (1992), p.339. For a Gentile author, see for example John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel: A Redactional Study of Matt. 5:17–48*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1976, pp.14-21.

29 See E. Schwartz, "Aporien im vierten Evangelium," in *Nachrichten von Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (1907), pp.342-72; (1908), pp.115-88; 497-560.

decades, the traditional material was sifted, selected, thought over, and molded into the form and style of the individual stories and discourses that became part of the Fourth Gospel. Stage 3: The evangelist organized the collected material and published it as a distinct work. Stage 4: The evangelist re-edited his Gospel to answer the objections or difficulties of several groups. Stage 5: A final editing or redaction by someone other than the evangelist, and whom we shall call the redactor.[30]

2Corinthians. Even though the second letter to the Corinthians is one of the letters attributed to Paul that is considered to contain authentic Pauline material,[31] many scholars are convinced it does not represent a solitary letter, but a combination of two different letters.[32] Edgar J. Goodspeed observed that from the beginning of 2Corinthians through Chapter 9, one senses harmony and reconciliation, whereas, abruptly, in Chapter 10, the mood changes to one of "personal misunderstanding and bitterness." He opines, therefore, that "This undeniable incongruity between the two parts of II Corinthians naturally suggests that we have in it two letters instead of one-one conciliatory and gratified, the other injured and incensed."[33]

What did these two letters look like before being joined together? What did the scribe who joined them do to fuse them together? More probably, the primitive shape of the two letters differs from the canonical letter, because we can see that the scribe who promulgated them did try to hide his action of combining the two letters together.

We could enumerate more examples from the list of the books of the New Testament, and all of them would indicate that the body of each of these books sends signs of multi-authors or redactors.

2. The Earliest Extant Manuscripts

Helmut Koester gives us the big picture of the second century state of the text when he declares, "the second century was *completely a period of*

30 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, pp. xxxiv- xxxvi

31 The letters of Paul considered by the majority of scholars today as genuine are Romans, 1and 2Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1Thessalonians, and Philemon. See John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom*, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004, p.105

32 Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.280

33 Edgar J. Goodspeed, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1937, pp.58-9

wild variation."[34] He put his finger on the malady that explains our failure to keep faith with the originality of the text known from the third century: "The text of the Synoptic Gospels was very unstable during the first and second centuries [. . .] there is *no guarantee* that the archetypes of the manuscript tradition are identical with the original text of each Gospel. . . . New Testament textual critics have been deluded by the hypothesis that the archetypes of the textual tradition which were fixed ca. 200 CE [. . .] are (almost) identical with the autographs. *This cannot be affirmed by any evidence*. On the contrary, whatever evidence there is indicates that not only minor, *but also substantial revisions of the original texts have occurred during the first hundred years of the transmission.*"[35]

D. Parker contends that the most substantial alterations in the text of the Gospels happened in the first hundred and fifty years, describing it as an "initial fluidity followed by stability." [36] He studied the sayings of Jesus on marriage and divorce and the Lord's Prayer in the Gospels, then concluded, "The main result of this survey is to show that the recovery of a single original saying of Jesus is impossible [. . .] What we have is a collection of interpretive rewritings of a tradition."[37] The six main forms of the Lord's Prayer, and the enormous mass of variants in just forty verses in Luke encountered by Parker, enabled a shattering of the text into a set of multi-faceted traditions created by the early communities. We can conclude from Parker's painstaking study that the earliest available manuscripts sprouted in a time where the canonical text had lost its original form due to its flexibility after being detached from the vanished autograph. So, the earliest decades of the *enlightened zone* reveal a blurry text that had lost its original form and its unity in that *obscure zone*.

3. The Harmonization Tendency

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of the early transmission of the text of the four gospels is the heavy tendency in the scribal tradition to deliberately remove the discrepancies in the four gospels and to harmonize

34 Helmut Koester, "The Text of the Synoptic Gospels in the Second Century," in William L. Petersen, ed. Gospel *Traditions in the Second Century: Origins, Recensions, Text, and Transmission*, Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame, 1989, pp.19-37 [italics mine].

35 Ibid., p.37 [italics mine].

36 David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels*, p.70

37 Ibid., p.92-93

their conflicting accounts. D. C. Parker concluded his interesting book "*The living text of the Gospels*" by declaring that "The reconstruction which has emerged from the present study is that the text and with it the traditions remained fluid for centuries, and that the work of the evangelists did not end when they laid down their pens. This may be demonstrated most clearly from the phenomenon of harmonisation [...]. That such harmonisations are found centuries after the compilation of the Gospels is incontrovertible evidence that the traditions continued to live, that is, to grow."[38]

Now, if the text from the earliest known phase of the New Testament's transmission shows clear signs of a flexible content that pruned to fit the orthodox creed of the inerrancy; we have a compelling reason to believe that the *obscure zone* was the stage of a more insidious scribal attempt to make the four distinct gospels conform more and more to each other, and to eliminate the disturbing discrepancies.

To counter our argument, Christian apologists are challenged to bring up a valid reason to break up the history of the scribal history into a neutral harmonization era in the *obscure zone* and a buoyant action era from the dawn of the *enlightened zone*. Tracing that history in such a way counters the common logic of the transmission of the Holy Scriptures and lacks positive evidence as well.

4. The Location of the Earliest Extant Manuscripts

The earliest manuscripts were found in one geographical area far from the place of composition of the autographs, which is Egypt. It is hard to believe that the Egyptian text is a faithful copy of the originals, which were brought from different areas, some from Europe. The Egyptian manuscripts are an *Egyptian version* of the text in the first centuries.

It has been argued that finding these manuscripts in Egypt does not mean that they came from Egypt, and that they may have been produced in other areas. I hold that a manuscript found in Egypt is an Egyptian manuscript until the opposite is proven. The burden of proof is on those who give such an unusual explanation. Moreover, Finney demonstrates that various early papyri and uncials (P^{13} P^{46} א A B D I) have similar orthography, and on the hypothesis that shared orthography implies shared provenance, Finney suggests that these witnesses were copied in the same region, possibly Egypt.[39]

38 Ibid., p.205

39 Timothy J. Finney, "*The Ancient Witnesses of the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Computer-Assisted*

It should be noted here that these Egyptian manuscripts differ from the text used by most of the Church Fathers of the same period in which the manuscripts were copied. The earliest extant manuscripts belong to the Alexandrian text-type. (Text-type: A major grouping of biblical manuscripts based on textual affinity in a large number of passages. The different text-type names—Alexandrian, Byzantine, Western—were coined based on the supposed origin of the manuscripts[40]), while the manuscripts of the earliest Fathers belong to the Western text-type as we will see it later.

5. The Patristic Citations

The available Church Fathers' citations coming from the second century give us evidence of the alteration of the New Testament. L. W. Hurtado reported that only a few explicit citations of New Testament writings were found in the writings of the second-century Christian authors, and even in these few cases, the citation "*often exhibits curious differences from the text of the writing that is dominant in the extant manuscripts*."[41]

The manuscripts used by the Church of the second century provide us valuable evidence that should not be overlooked, which is the disturbing dissimilarities between them and the manuscripts of subsequent centuries. This highlights the historical fact that whenever the circulation of the manuscripts is meager, the chances for corruption are larger. What is striking in this testimony is that it is based on the data provided by the Church Fathers of the second century, which is much more extensive than that which we can get from the manuscripts of the second century.

In a very interesting essay, William P. Petersen concluded his study of the use of the New Testament in the second century, as it appears in the extant writings of that time, with some striking observations.

- Harmonization of the quotations from the Gospels seems to be omnipresent and prominent.

Analysis of the Papyrus and Uncial Manuscripts of PROS EBRAIOUS" (PhD Diss., Murdoch University, 1999), pp.194-211. (See Maurice A. Robinson, "The Case for Byzantine Priority," in Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform*, Southborough, MA: Chilton Book Pub., 2005, p. 570)

40 M. S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001, p.121

41 L. W. Hurtado, "The New Testament in the Second Century: Text, Collections and Canon," in J. W. Childers and D. C. Parker, eds., *Transmission and Reception: New Testament Text-Critical and Exegetical Studies*, Piscataway, NJ: Georgias Press, 2006, pp.14-5 [italics mine].

- Extra-canonical material is prominent, and mingled with the canonical texts. There seems to have been no clear demarcation between traditions that were "proto-canonical" and those that were "proto-extra-canonical."
- The passages that have a parallel in the canonical Gospels are usually riddled with variants.
- Even where we can recognize a passage as having a parallel in what we now call the canonical Gospels, the sequence of the recognizable material has often been altered.
- The earlier we go in the second century, the more the parallels with our canonical Gospels fall off, and the citations grow vaguer and vaguer.
- The earlier we go, the less emphasis is placed on the words and life of Jesus.[42]

Then he concludes that these six characteristics which were indisputably present in the second century should make us believe strongly that more evidence pointing to the same historical phenomenon was existent in the first century, especially when we know that the standards of the notion of "orthodoxism" and its derivative were not clear nor fully developed.[43]

6. The Western Text-type

The Western text-type was the text-type used by almost all the Christian Fathers of the early centuries. This text-type is not actually a homogeneous group of texts; its entities are so dissimilar that Metzger said, "so diverse are the textual phenomena that von Soden was compelled to posit seventeen sub-groups of witnesses which are more or less closely related to this text."[44] Holmes notes, "This Type of Texts represents a tradition of uncontrolled copying, editing, and translation: it exhibits harmonistic tendencies, paraphrasing and substitution of synonyms, additions (sometimes quite long)."[45] These characteristics tell us clearly that modifying the Holy Text was an early Christian habit.

The peaceful coexistence of the Western text-type—which is already a blend of readings—with the Alexandrian text-type informs us that the early

42 See William. L. Petersen, "The Genesis of the Gospels," pp.54-5

43 Ibid., p.45

44 Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, fourth edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.187

45 Michael W. Holmes, "Reconstructing the Text of the New Testament," in David E. Aune, *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p.82

"orthodox" Christians knew that the annoying mass of divergent readings was not an easy problem to resolve, and they confessed that they had deep roots in the history of the texts.

7. The Use of Mark by Matthew and Luke

Due to the compelling arguments for the use of Mark by Matthew and Luke, which is a hypothesis accepted by the majority of scholars today, Helmut Koester worked on the agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark (called "the minor agreements") to find out the reason for this odd disagreement. He finished by concluding that the authors of Matthew and Luke did use a copy of Mark (Proto-Mark) different from ours, so the disagreement noticed today between Mark and the other two Gospels was not there in the first century when these three Gospels were written. Koester's suggestion is not just a plausible explanation for the enigmatic disagreement between Matthew and Luke against their shared source, which is the only serious apparent defect[46] in the "two source-hypothesis" to explain the inter-relationship between the synoptic Gospels, but it is also a successful attempt to throw light on the *obscure zone*.

The oldest[47] discoverable text of the Gospel of Mark differs from ours in many instances; it includes "cases in which Matthew and Luke agree in the wording of a phrase or sentence that is different from Mark's text; and cases in which Markan words, sentences, or entire pericopes are absent from both Matthew and Luke."[48]

Daniel B. Wallace goes on to say that the differences between Matthew and Luke against Mark (in the parallel passages) are hints that "the copies of Mark that Matthew and Luke used were not identical to Mark's original."[49] Wallace opts for the opposite inference to Koester's hypothesis by claiming

46 See R. M. Wilson, "Farrer and Streeter on the Minor Agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark," in *Studia Evangelica* 1 (1959) 254-7; E. W. Burrows, "The use of textual theories to explain agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark," in J. K. Elliott, *Studies in New Testament Language ad Text*, Leiden, 1976; R. B. Vinson, "*The Significance of the Minor Agreements as an argument against the Two-Document Hypothesis*," unpublished PhD dissertation.

47 We are still not talking about the "original text," because a copy used in the first century (by two evangelists) needs to show real positive proof for its faithfulness to the lost autograph.

48 Helmut Koester, "The Text of the Synoptic Gospels in the Second century," p.21

49 Daniel B. Wallace, *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic, and Apocryphal Evidence*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011, p.50

that the text of Mark's Gospel used by the two other evangelists is not the earliest version of Mark. Wallace makes the case worse for the quest for the original text of the earliest canonical Gospel, because he is proving that the corruption of Mark's Gospel started from the very early years, before even the use of the text by the two holy authors in the golden era of the inscription of the Word of God.

8. The Hereticals' Text

Eberhard Nestle pointed at a very crucial fact when he said, "Nearly all the heretics were in turn accused of falsifying the scriptures."[50] For instance, Epiphanius accused Marcion of altering some of the Gospels' passages[51], and Irenaeus claimed that Marcion "dismembered the epistles of Paul, removing all that is said by the apostle respecting that God who made the world, to the effect that He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also those passages from the prophetical writings which the apostle quotes, in order to teach us that they announced beforehand the coming of the Lord."[52]

Now we know that the "heresy" is not "a deforming of the truth"; it is rather a mere disagreement with the Christians who had the upper hand politically, starting from the fourth century. And because of a general lack of proof in the charge made by the "orthodox" Church Fathers, we have the right to doubt the trustworthiness of the accusation, and to ask if the Nicaean Church is the one which tempered the New Testament to make the "heretics" lose their proof-texts.

Bart Ehrman turned our doubt into a conviction when he stated that "recent studies have shown that the evidence of our surviving manuscripts points the finger in the opposite direction. Scribes who were associated with the *orthodox* tradition not infrequently changed their texts, sometimes in order to eliminate the possibility of their "misuse" by Christians affirming heretical beliefs and sometimes to make them more amenable to the doctrines being espoused by Christians of their own persuasion."[53] More recent scholars are defending the view that Marcion did not alter the manuscripts he received from the previous generation, but rather, he largely preserved readings already available in his days.[54]

50 Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament*, p.197

51 See Epiphanius, *Panarion* 42. 10. 4-5

52 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.27.2

53 Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, New York: HarperCollins, 2005, p.53

54 See G. Quispel, "Marcion and the Text of the New Testament," in *Vigiliae Christianae* 52,

On the other hand, Celsus, a Greek philosopher and opponent of Christianity who lived in the second century (the *obscure zone*) declared, as quoted by Origen, that some Christian believers "alter the original text of the Gospel three or four or several times over, and they change its character to enable them to deny difficulties in face of criticism."[55] This accusation has a lot of credibility because it is confirmed by the core of recent studies.

9. The Non-canonical Gospels

The mass of the early non-canonical Gospels reveal that there have been other of Jesus' traditions circulating in the first century, [56] and that may be a good reason, if connected with the early theological controversies, to reflect upon existing relationships between the canonical traditions and the non-canonical ones in the early stages of the shaping of the four Gospels after writing the autographs. The extra-canonical texts quoted by the early Church Fathers, such as Tatian[57] and Clement of Alexandria[58], prove that at least a century after the writing of the Gospels, many sayings of Jesus were circulating as authoritative words even though they are not included in the later copies of the New Testament.

1998, 349-60; cf. U. Schmid, *Marcion und sein Apostolos: Rekonstruktion und historische Einordnung der marcionitischen Paulusbriefausgabe*, New York: de Gruyter, 1995; and J. J. Clabeaux, *A Lost Edition of the Letters of Paul: A Reassessment of the Text of the Pauline Corpus Attested by Marcion*, CBQMS 21; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989, as mentioned by Amy Donaldson, "*Explicit References to New Testament Variant Readings Among Greek and Latin Church Fathers*," 1/289, unpublished manuscript. Graduate Program in Theology, Notre Dame, Indiana, December 2009. Retrieved from: http://etd.nd.edu/ETD-db/theses/available/etd-12112009-152813/unrestricted/DonaldsonA122009_Vol_I.pdf

55 Origen, Against Celsus 2.27

56 See Paul Foster, "Is it possible to dispense with Q?," in *Novum Testamentum*, Oct 2003, Vol. 45 Issue 4, p. 316

57 For instance,

(1) At Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River (Matthew 3/15-16), a "light" is reported to have shone in the water.

(2) At Matthew 8/4, Jesus apparently instructs the healed leper to "Go, fulfill the Law."

(3) At Luke 4/29-30, Jesus is apparently thrown from the hilltop by the mob, but flies away unhurt, eventually landing in Capernaum.

(4) At Luke 23/48, the Jews apparently say something like, "Woe to us, what has befallen us? The destruction of Jerusalem is nigh!" (William. L. Petersen, "The Genesis of the Gospels," p.42)

58 See M. Mees, *Die Zitate aus dem Neuen Testament bei Clemens von Alexandrien*, Bari: Istituto di Letteratura Cristiana Antica, 1970

William L. Petersen finds the extra-canonical clauses in the Diatessaron to be “evidence that, by 172 or so, there appears to have been neither an established text of the Gospels nor a reverential attitude towards their text; rather, the traditional we now regard as parts of the canonical Gospels were malleable, rearrangeable, and subject to the whims of any writer, editor, or harmonist.”[59]

10. The New Critical Texts

The current critical editions, as a whole, are not found in any extant manuscript, version, or Father citation. Textual critic scholars are crea-ting a text from variants dispersed in a huge mass of witnesses. These artificial entities are concrete evidence for early waves of corruptions that start from a time earlier than the date of the copying of our earliest witnesses. Thinking that the *obscure zone* was an era of a perfect and faithful transmission of the autograph must be far from true, because that would mean that a sharp, abrupt shift had occurred at the earliest years of the enlightened zone, from a strict copying of the exact words of the authors to the loss of any copy that held the exact original text.

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What can we conclude? As a matter of fact, we are, on the one hand, missing arguments for a genealogical map that proves a safe transmission of the autograph throughout the first two centuries, and we possess, on the other hand, clear signs for a *live* text throughout the same period.

Show Me the Way?

The witnesses of the New Testament text that we possess are, in one way or another, an unpleasant burden, because they are the main reason for the emergence of the conflicting textual methods which all have one claim: the restoration of the original/best attainable text from the available witnesses (manuscripts, versions, and patristic citations). Today, these conflicting methods demonstrate that the path to the oldest text is not straight and, sadly, they do not give us assurance that they would lead us to the exact destination. These methods strive to restore the original/best attainable text, but the fact that we are far away from the desired text cannot be hidden. Our search shows how hard it is to derive the best reading from the medley of fabricated readings. The main actual methods are as follows:

59 William. L. Petersen, “The Genesis of the Gospels,” p. 43

Textus Receptus. This is the Greek text prepared by the Dutch scholar Erasmus in the sixteenth century. The basis of this text is six old manuscripts with a Byzantine type of text. It became standard in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This text has been almost universally abandoned by scholars since the end of the nineteenth century.

Majority Text. Some scholars embrace the theory that the original text is preserved in the majority of manuscripts. It is a statistical construct of the text that focuses on the number of times the variant reading (a different wording or reading of a biblical text that is found in a manuscript)[60] is repeated in the manuscript. So, according to this theory, recovering the original text needs only that one collect the most repeated readings.[61]

Traditional Critical Method. This method was prevalent in the nineteenth century, and it was used by famous scholars like Lachmann, Tischendorf, Westcott, and Hort. It consists of choosing a good manuscript to be the base of the new constructed text, and evaluating its reading when compared with other manuscripts.

Eclectic Method. This method states that the best readings are not found in a sole manuscript; rather, they are scattered in the mass of manuscripts. A scholar has to select the best reading based on the rules that he has pre-adopted, and he is supposed to deal solely with each variant reading. This method is usually classified according to the use of the internal and external criteria. We have two main categories, general eclecticism and radical eclecticism.

1. General Eclecticism: The majority of scholars today adopt the general eclecticism method. It is based on concern for the internal (the contents of the text and the peculiarities and habits of scribes) and the external evidences (the manuscripts) when weighting the different variant readings. Moreover, it is characterized by its preference for the Alexandrian text-type. Within the general eclecticism method, we can make a distinction between a reasoned eclectic method and a local-genealogical method.
    - Reasoned eclecticism is the widely accepted textual technique, the main characteristic of which is that it first clearly

60 M. S. DeMoss, *Pocket dictionary for the study of New Testament Greek*, p.127

61 See John William Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, London: John Murray, 1883, Wilbur Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977

distinguishes between internal and external evidence, so it is possible to consider the two kinds of evidence apart from each other. The same, too, is applicable to the scribal customs and the author customs. Secondly, this technique focuses more on the external evidence than the internal kinds.[62]

- o The local-genealogical method was formulated or at least named and promulgated by Kurt Aland. It is based on drawing a stemma for each variant reading, not the entire book[63]. This method works on a number of broad general principles, rather than detailed formulated criteria, and emphasizes more the external evidence, while refusing partly the Hortian model of the history and the classification of the text-types.[64]

2. Radical Eclecticism: Advocated in many articles and books by G. D. Kilpatrick and J. K. Elliott, this method focuses almost solely on the internal aspects of the text, by choosing the reading that explains the first century language and the style of the author and his theological background.[65] This textual approach starts from a conviction that all the variant readings arose prior to the time of the earliest surviving manuscripts, so these manuscripts cannot be the decisive factor in reaching the original or the most satisfactory reading.

We can conclude the following from these diverse textual critic methods:

- How deceptive is the certainty of the Church that our copies contain the same words written by the so-called inspired authors, and that the original text was transmitted from one generation to another all the way through the history of the Christian nation.
- Even though it is accepted by the overwhelming majority of scholars, reasoned eclecticism cannot lead us to the first text. A. F. J. Klijn, a proponent of this method, declared that "those who, by the way of the eclectic method, try to restore the original text

62See J. H. Petzer, "Eclecticism and the Text of the New Testament," in Patrick J. Hartin and J. H. Petzer, eds., *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament*, Leiden: Brill, 1991, p.51

63 See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed.), p.43*

64 See J. H. Petzer, "Eclecticism and the Text of the New Testament," pp.52-4

65 See J. K. Elliott and Ian Moir, *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament: An Introduction for English Readers*, Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1995, pp.34-5

have reached markedly disparate results. *The eclectic method seems to be the only adequate method to regain the original text, but it also appears to lead us into complete chaos.*"[66]

When Textual Criticism Is Confusing

The pop culture that the Church tries hard to imitate in the public domain *tends to simplify what is complex and to ignore its problems; so the message being conveyed will be easy to accept and be absorbed.* One of these problems is the search for the original reading.

It is very well known in academic studies that choosing the original or the best reading is an immeasurably hard and intricate task, and that the differences between the choices of the variant readings reflect the differences between the textual criticism methods. We can notice different results even in the same school, and that shows how delicate a matter it is to opt for a preferred reading. The actual situation appears to be even worse than this, given the fact that scholars often change some of their preferences when they reprint their own critical texts.

We can see most of the preceding assertions exemplified in the editions of the *United Bible Societies Greek New Testament* (abbreviated: UBS), from the first edition to the fourth one. K. D. Clark revealed the unexpected shifting of the UBS^4 with the help of detailed charts and lengthy statistics and calculations.[67] Although the teams which worked on it were homogenous, we can detect changes in the preferred readings. The UBS committee, which follows one textual criticism school, introduced more than five hundred changes[68] in the third edition after only seven years of the publishing of the second one, in a period of time that did not know any significant discovery.[69] Silva, evaluating the rating's change for Romans to

66 A. F. J. Klijn, "In Search of the Original Text of Acts," in L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn, *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1966, p.104 [italics mine].

67 K. D. Clarke, *Textual Optimism: A Critique of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997

68 Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, New York: United Bible Societies, 1975, p. viii

69 K. D. Clark, *Textual Optimism*, p.129: "The addition of these various witnesses has not necessarily brought new insight or fresh proof into the evaluation of variants, and hence the determining of a more likely reading" (even though what Clark said is about the difference between UBS3 and the UBS4, his statement is a fortiori applicable to the difference between UBS2 and UBS3.)

Galatians as recorded in the UBS[3] and UBS[4], writes, "How radically different is the resulting complexion of the material can be seen by comparing the totals from the third and fourth editions: Third Fourth A 20 93 B 62 64 C99 55 D 25 2..."[70]

The way that scholars weigh the readings makes it clear that the original text is not yet close to being derived. For instance, the UBS[4] committee did not treat the variants as "original reading" versus "fabricated reading." The committee acknowledged that there are different degrees of determination, and it is not just "right" or "wrong," which is the reason that the critical Apparatus (the data presented in footnotes at the bottom of the page in a critical biblical text in which the witnesses for the variant readings are cited)[71] used variant letter-ratings:

- The letter A indicates that the text is certain.
- The letter B indicates that the text is almost certain.
- The letter C indicates that the committee had difficulty in deciding which variant to place in the text.
- The letter D indicates that the committee had great difficulty in arriving at a decision.[72]

It is noteworthy that the UBS[4] changed the definition of the A, B, C, and D ratings made in the UBS[3], and in so doing, elaborated them to include the degrees of certainty of its ratings[73]. The fourth edition's preface declared, "The Committee also redefined the various levels in the evaluation of evidence on the basis of their relative degrees of certainty. Thus the evaluation of all the 1437 sets of variants cited in the apparatus have been completely reconsidered."[74]

When we reflect on the details of the UBS apparatus, we are shocked to discover that the ratings of the choices of the committee of the UBS[3] , for instance, are as follows:[75]

70 Silva, "*Symposium*," p.352 (Quoted by K. D. Clark, op. cit., p.120)

71 M. S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek*, p.40

72 See *The Greek New Testament*, fourth revision edition, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994 , p.3*

73 See K. D. Clarke and K. Bales, "The Construction of Biblical Certainty: Textual Optimism and the United Bible Society's Greek New Testament," in D. G. K. Taylor, ed., *Studies in the Early Text of the Gospels and Acts, Texts and Studies, third Series, 1*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1999, pp.86-93

74 The Greek New Testament, p.v

75 E. J. Edwards, "On Using the Textual Apparatus of the UBS Greek New Testament," in *The*

- A-Ratings: 8.7%
- B-Ratings: 32. 3%
- C-Ratings: 48.6 %
- D-Ratings: 10.4%

As J. H. Petzer writes, "If one distinguishes between the A and the B ratings on the one hand, assigning the broad classification 'certain' to them, and the C and the D ratings on the other, assigning the broad classification 'uncertain' to them, the decision of the committee is still uncertain in more than 59% of the more or less 1,440 variation-units included in the text."[76]

The Mercy Bullet

What text do we have? Is it the text written by the authors, or the text(s) used by the readers? There is no clear answer to the first question, and there is no reason to reject the second one. So, we are forced to admit that we do not have the exact words of the autograph.

When Bart Ehrman said, "What is remarkable is that throughout this history, *virtually no one has read them in their original form*,"[77] he simply shoots the Mercy Bullet into the dream of the "believers," who think that they do hear the message of God throughout the New Testament text. This is not God's voice, if we accept the claim that the original text was an inspired word; rather, it is a *mélange* of the authors' texts and of later scribes' additions.

Finally, if no one (known to us) has been able to read the original text, then no one will *ever* succeed in reading it, because they would be trying to grasp a vanished text that lost its original form in its first years or maybe even in its first days.

Bible Translator, 28, p.122

76 J. H. Petzer, "The Papyri and New Testament Textual Criticism, Clarity or Confusion?" in J. H. Petzer and P. J. Hartin, eds. *A South African Perspective on the New Testament: Essays by South African New Testament Scholars Presented to Bruce Manning Metzger During His Visit to South Africa in 1985*, Leiden: Brill, 1986, p.27

77 Bart Ehrman, "The Use and Significance of Patristic Evidence for NT Textual Criticism," in Barbara Aland and Joël Delobel eds., *New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis and Early Church History: a Discussion of Methods*, Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Pub. House, 1994, p.127 [italics mine].

Why We Cannot Trust the Greek Manuscripts

The Bible is the most accurately transmitted book from the ancient world. No other ancient book has as many, as early, or more accurately copied manuscripts.
— Norman L. Geisler, *Apologetics Study Bible*, p.468

The Church, when talking about the authenticity of the New Testament text, has always shown pride in the large number of existing manuscripts, but unfortunately, it overvalues the worth of these manuscripts when presented in a milieu devoid of scholarship. The Church does not go beyond the *numbers* to discuss the *problems* and the *imperfections* of the manuscripts when used by scholars to reconstruct the so-called original text or even to construct a critical text.

Most of the apologetic books that do try to prove the integrity of the text of the New Testament go no further than exposing two things: the huge number of manuscripts of the New Testament that exist, and a comparison of that number with the number of extant manuscripts of other ancient books, such as the *Iliad* (an epic poem written around the eighth century B.C.).[1] Few of the apologists tend toward proof that we can reconstruct the *original* text through the earliest manuscripts.

We will scrutinize the apologists' claims, with the exception of the comparison made between the New Testament manuscripts and the other books' manuscripts, because it is nonsensical to use books for whose texts no one can vouchsafe complete integrity to prove the faithful transmission of the New Testament. This is true without even having to mention the fact that modern day scholars have doubts as to whether some of these books, as is the case for the *Iliad*,[2] were written by the authors to whom they have been attributed.

1 See Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979, 1/41-3; Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus: A Journalist Investigates Current Attacks on the Identity of Christ*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007, p.84

2 Homer's life: "Much of this information [about Homer's life] is recognizably fantastic and nearly all of it is probably worthless." (G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: a commentary*, Cambridge: Cambridge University

We need to study the value of the manuscripts of the New Testament pragmatically, by checking to see if they can really lead us to the text written by the original authors. Moreover, we need to do this after giving the scholars who claim that these manuscripts can lead us to the autograph a chance to exhibit the way they think the original text can be restored, given their dissimilar textual criticism methods.

Numbers Deception

Almost all of the apologetic books that preach the *good news* of the authenticity of the New Testament mention that we possess around 5500 New Testament manuscripts. Surely, this number is great and impressive, but can it back up the claim of the Church that it unequivocally still preserves the true word of the authors of the New Testament? The persistent answer made by the apologists is, as Michael W. Holmes tells us, "misleading," because this "bare statement does not reveal the circumstance that approximately eighty-five percent of those manuscripts were copied in the eleventh century or later, over a millennium after the writing of the New Testament. With regard to the fifteen percent or so of manuscripts that do date from the first millennium of the text's existence, *the closer one gets in time of the origins of the New Testament, the more scarce the manuscript evidence becomes*. Indeed, for the first century or more after its composition, from roughly the late first century to the beginning of the third, we have very little manuscript evidence for any of the New Testament documents, and *for some books the gap extends toward two centuries or more*."[3]

Fifteen percent of those manuscripts go back to the first millennium, only a third of them were copied before 800 A.D.,[4] and most of them are just small scraps that contain only a few chapters or only a few verses. Only fifty-nine manuscripts contain the entire New Testament, and most of these are very late.[5] The closer we move toward the date of composition, the smaller

Press, 1985, 1/2). When was the Iliad first written down? "Here, as nowhere else, we enter the realms of speculation and controversy." (Michael Silk, *Homer, the Iliad*, second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.8). Many doubts were expressed concerning the early history of the Iliad.

3 Michael W. Holmes, "Text and Transmission in the Second Century," in Robert B. Stewart, ed. *The Reliability of the New Testament: Bart Ehrman and Daniel Wallace in Dialogue*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011, p.61 [italics mine].

5 See Michael W. Holmes, "Reconstructing the Text of the New Testament," p.80

are the manuscripts in size and the fewer in number (fewer than 2.5 percent are from the first five centuries).[6]

Can the *Majority Text Method* lead us to the original text? Or, if we extend the sphere to include all the manuscripts, can we say, with the Alands,[7] that the original text exists without a doubt in the extant manuscripts,[8] even if its verses are dispersed, because, historically speaking, it is illogical to imagine that across the centuries, our manuscripts have retained corrupted texts and lost the original wording?

The *Majority Text Method* faces an overwhelming rejection in academic circles, even being refuted by some scholars who are the foremost advocates of the Bible, like Daniel B. Wallace (who started his career as a Majority Text proponent).

The "Majority" or "Byzantine" text is made up of some eighty to ninety percent of all the known manuscripts,[9] but it is a majority only in the late centuries because it was a minority before the ninth century.[10] So the extant manuscripts are proof of the late transmission of the New Testament manuscripts. Through them we know the shape of the text in Christendom during the second millennium. As a matter of fact, the label "Majority" is misleading because it does not cover our research for the text before it was copied for distribution. The label is deluding us in our search for the text in its virgin state.

Pragmatically, we will face a problem with the claim of *majority* when we start looking for the majority reading. In hundreds of instances[11], it is not possible to put our finger on a majority variant because the scriptures are divided so much that it is not possible to talk about majority versus minority(ies). Sometimes the plethora of variant readings demonstrates that

6 Ibid.

7 The Alands are not pro-Majority text.

8 See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, tr. Erroll F. Rhodes. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995, p.296

9 Michael W. Holmes, "The 'Majority Text Debate': New Form of an Old Issue," *Themelios* 8.2 (January, 1983), p.15. Gordon D. Fee, "Textual Criticism of the New Testament," in Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee, eds. *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993, p.8

10 See Daniel B. Wallace, "The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 37, 1994, p.202

11 Daniel B. Wallace, *Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism* http://bible.org/article/inspiration-preservation-and-new-testament-textual-criticism (12/5/2011)

there was a serious dispute over the original reading from the earlier time to the recent centuries before the printing of the Bible.

Hypothetically speaking, numbers mean nothing. Colwell remarked, "Suppose that there are only ten copies of a document and that nine are all copied from one; then the majority can be safely rejected. Or suppose that the nine are copied from a lost manuscript and that this lost manuscript and the other one were both copied from the original; then the vote of the majority would not outweigh that of the minority."[12]

This text is an apparent corruption of the earlier texts; it "has all the appearance of being a careful attempt to supersede the chaos of rival texts by a judicious selection from them all."[13] It differs from the modern critical text in about 6,500 places,[14] and by consequence it cannot be reconciled with the best witnesses of the best attainable text of the New Testament.

Most modern advocates of the Majority Text are motivated by religious belief, not scientific truth; they think that God would not have allowed a corrupt text to be found in the majority of manuscripts.[15] It is a nebulous theory that *cannot be reinforced by the best and the earliest manuscripts, and it also lacks support from early versions and early patristic citations.* [16] It does not belong to the world of the earliest centuries. It came into being through a late-emerging impetus. It reflects the late Christian theological tendencies, not an early stable holy text.

To sum up, the Byzantine text is a late corrupted text that stemmed from the second half of the *fourth century and left (almost) no trace before that.*[17] *To derive the best reading, we need to consider many internal and external*

12 Ernest. C. Colwell, "Genealogical Method: Its Achievements and Its Limitations," in *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, Leiden: Brill, 1969, p. 65

13 Brooke Foss Westcott, Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in The Original Greek*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881, pp.549-50

14 See Daniel B. Wallace, *The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical?*, http://bible.org/article/majority-text-and-original-text-are-they-identical#note_3 (3/9/2011)

15 See Philip W. Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography and Textual Criticism*, Nashville: Broadman & Holman,2005, p.98

16 See Daniel B. Wallace, *The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical?*; Gordon Fee, "A Critique of W. N. Pickering's The Identity of the New Testament Text," in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 41 (1979), pp. 397-423

17 Some scholars do believe the existence of a very few Byzantine readings in early papyri, See Daniel B. Wallace critic on Sturz's exaggeration, in *The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique*, p.207

pieces of evidence that need to be appraised. Scholars define this concept in a New Testament textual principle: "*manuscripts must be weighed, not merely counted.*"[18]

The Alands' assumption cannot offer plausible answers for the serious challenging questions; it is a *hyper*-optimistic view that refuses to discuss the roots of the copied text and ignores the problematic details. The Alands' claim should be rejected for many reasons.

1. It has plainly failed to draw a visible history of the autograph. The best that it can claim is that it brings the text to the third century. Due to the time gap between the autograph and the extant manuscripts, we are unable to have a full picture of the history of the text.
2. Scholars today agree that theological tendencies were behind part of the scribal alterations of the text of the New Testament starting from the end of the second century[19], and in consequence, we can declare that there is no historical logic to denying any possible change in the text during the period the New Testament documents were infrequently in circulation.
3. We can find traces of lost original readings in the course of the search for the original/best readings. This is what scholars call "conjectural emendation," which is the proposal of a reading not found in any surviving witness.[20] We can perceive some of the "lost originals" in the UBS comments.
    - At Mark 6:22, Metzger defends the choice of the UBS Committee by saying, "It is very difficult to decide which reading is the least unsatisfactory."[21]
    - At Acts 16:12, the United Bible Societies Editorial Committee says, "dissatisfied for various reasons with all these readings in Greek witnesses, a majority of the Committee preferred to adopt the conjecture proposed by a number of scholars from Le Clerc to Blass and Turner, namely to read πρώτης for πρώτη τῆς, with the resultant meaning, "a city of the first district of Macedonia."[22]

18 See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp.280-81

19See Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, New York: Oxford University Press US, 1996

20 D. A. Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A concise guide*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994, p. 24

21 Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, second edition, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000, p.77

22 Ibid., pp.394-95

- At Acts 16:13, the Committee described "the difficulties presented by this verse" as "well-nigh baffling," and in the end adopted what it termed "the least unsatisfactory reading."[23]
- At 1 Cor. 6: 5, the text as found in all extant Greek manuscripts reads, "διακριναι ανα μεσον του αδελφου αυτου" ("to judge between his brother"), which is an impossible phrase in Greek that makes no more sense than it does in English, if we were to say something like "traveling between Minneapolis." It is, as Zunts notes, the result of a *homoeoteleuton error* (an unintentional error of eyesight committed when copying the biblical text, due to words or lines that end similarly)[24] in the archetype from which all surviving manuscripts descend.[25]

Westcott and Hort applied emendation in their edition of the Greek New Testament in sixty-five places where they thought that the readings we know cannot be accepted as part of the autograph.[26]

Even though he is not sympathetic with the "conjectural emendation" practice, D. A. Black admits that "anyone familiar with recent literature will have detected an increasing tendency to reject all the forms in which a passage has been preserved in the MS tradition and to resort to conjectural emendation to supply what is believed to be a more correct, or at least a less unsatisfactory, reading."[27]

Origen, from the first decades of the third century, could not resist opting several times for readings not found in any manuscripts in his time,[28] which makes it clear that scholars of the first centuries knew well the deficiency of the work of the scribes and were aware that the early copies did not assure us that we were actually reading the original authors' words. After noting many variant readings mentioned by the Church Fathers which are absent from today's critical apparatus, Amy

23 See ibid., pp.395-96

24 M. S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek*, p.68

25 Michael W. Holmes, "Text and Transmission in the Second Century," p.67

26 See B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek. 2, Introduction*, Cambridge: Macmillan, 1881, pp.279-82

27 David Alan Black, "Conjectural Emendations in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 31, Fasc. 1 (Jan., 1989), p.1

28 See Amy Donaldson, *Explicit References to New Testament Variant Readings Among Greek and Latin Church Fathers*, 1/262

M. Donaldson concluded that "these examples of rare variants, along with their suspicion that original readings were lost early in transmission, both contribute to the notion that for all the readings extant today, *there are still some readings that have been lost—perhaps even some readings that were original.*"[29]

The famous scholar J.K. Elliott says of transcriptional probabilities (the likelihood of a copyist, in transmission, doing one thing over another [e.g., a type of mistake], which provides a basis for text-critical decisions)[30], "By using criteria such as the above the critic may reach a conclusion in discussing textual variants and be able to say which variant is the original reading. However, it is legitimate to ask: can a reading be accepted as genuine if it is supported by only one ms.? *There is no reason why an original reading should not have been preserved in only one ms.* but obviously a reading can be accepted with greater confidence, when it has stronger support."[31] Kurt Aland, even though his textual method is based on external evidence, wrote: "Theoretically, the original readings can be hidden in a single ms. thus standing alone against the rest of tradition."[32] It is certainly legitimate to ask: What is the real difference between one manuscript among thousands, and no manuscripts at all? If the original reading can be found in a sole manuscript, why not imagine that it can be absent even from that lonely manuscript?! Claiming that authentic passages cannot be lost in the chaos of *variants has no historical basis, because we lack totally details of the early history of the text, and we have positive proof of a vanished original.*

4. The pessimism of Kurt Aland in describing his success in reaching the ultimate goal for the textual criticism discipline in his defense on NA[26] reveals his acknowledgement that reaching the exact original text is impossible. He said, "A hundred years after Westcott-Hort, the goal of an edition of the New Testament 'in the original Greek' seems to have been reached.[…] The desired goal appears now to have been attained: to

29 Ibid., 1/319 [italics mine].

30 M. S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek*, p.124

31 J. K. Elliott, *The Greek Text of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, ed. Jacob Geerlings, Studies and Documents, XXXVI, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1968, pp.10-1

32 K. Aland, "The Significance of the Papyri for Progress in New Testament Research," in J.P. Hyatt, ed. The *Bible in Modern Scholarship*, New York: Abingdon Press, 1965, p. 340

offer the writings of the New Testament in the form of the text that comes *nearest* to that which, from the hand of their authors or redactors, they set out on their journey in the Church of the first and second centuries."[33]

Barbara Aland stated, in an essay written a few years ago when talking about the viewpoint of the well-known Institute for New Testament Textual Research, founded by Kurt Aland and later directed by her, regarding the goals of New Testament textual criticism, "Although we cannot claim ever to have established the New Testament text in its original Ur-Text form, our goal was to get as close to this Ur-Text form as was humanly possible."[34] She pointed out a difference between "the original text" written by the author, which is "lost and cannot be reconstructed"[35] and "the initial text," which is "the form of a text that stands at the beginning of the textual tradition."[36] The second "text" is the target of the textual critic discipline, while the first one is out of reach. So the Alands succeed in getting close to the "original text," which is "the desired goal," but fail to reach that text because it is out of reach and is not part of the possible goals.

What About the Earliest Manuscripts?

In his book *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*, Philip W. Comfort declares that we can restore the *original text* of New Testament through the earliest surviving manuscripts found in Egypt.[37] It is the only conservative book that deals "seriously" with this problematic matter; and it needs to be answered. Comfort's claim is the most "straightforward" challenge based on the trustworthiness of the early manuscripts, but at first it was refuted by eminent scholars, and then ignored, since it does not answer the challenging questions, because of its self contradictory claims. Following is a summary of our objections to Comfort's claim:

33 Kurt Aland, "The Twentieth-Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism," in Ernest Best and Robert M. Wilson, eds. *Text and Interpretation: Studies in New Testament Presented to Matthew Black*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.14 [italics mine].

34 Barbara Aland, "New Testament Textual Research, Its Methods and Its Goals," in Stanley E. Porter and Mark J. Boda, eds. *Translating the New Testament: Text, Translation, Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009, pp. 16-7

35 Ibid., p.17

36 Ibid.

37 "The manuscripts discovered in Egypt are the ones from which we can reconstruct the original text of the Greek New Testament," p.127

1. Comfort failed to present a reasonable reading of the history of the text; he could not shed light on the *obscure zone* that starts from the writing of the autograph to the end of the second century.
2. The period of the papyri is the confused stage of the text that "can never be known"[38] as a whole, as was avowed by the textual critic Frederic George Kenyon, who was a zealous defender of the authenticity of the New Testament text.
3. When Comfort exposes the details, he starts arguing against his own theory. For instance, he says about the Gospel of Mark, which is the earliest canonical Gospel and a direct source for Matthew and Luke: "Ironically, the earliest Gospel, Mark (written 65-70), has not been preserved in very many early manuscripts. And to add to the irony (and mystery), Mark was supposed to have taken his gospel with him to Egypt (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 2: 16: 1), and yet there are hardly any early extant copies of Mark among the many discoveries of manuscripts in Egypt. *The earliest* copy of Mark is preserved in P^{45}, but it is *not a very faithful copy*. In the book of Mark especially, the scribe of P^{45} exerted *many personal liberties in making a text that replicated more the thought of his exemplar than the actual words.* As is well known, P^{45} has marked affinities with the fifth-century manuscript W. The more "normal" text of Mark is preserved in one early fourth-century manuscript, P^{88} and two later fourth-century manuscripts, א and B. *Until there are more discoveries of early Marcan manuscripts, it is difficult to reconstruct the early history of the text*."[39]

   Comfort's claim is grossly inconsistent. How can we access the original text of the New Testament through the earliest manuscripts while knowing that we do not have enough faithful early manuscripts to reconstruct the original text of the most important book in the New Testament?!
4. Comfort's dating of the earliest papyri has no support from the majority of scholars. Maurice A. Robinson harshly criticized Comfort in his review of Comfort and Barrett's book *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts,* where he stated that they "appear to apply their own palaeographical criteria in dating various manuscripts and tend to claim an

38 See Frederic George Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, London: Macmillan, 1901, p.35

39 Philip W. Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*, p.107 [italics mine].

earlier date for many manuscripts included in their volume than might be allowed by other palaeographers."[40]

As mentioned by Kurt and Barbara Aland, the only manuscripts we possess that can be dated to the second century are $P^{52,}$ which includes a few words from John 18: 31-33, 37-37, and P^{90}, which includes only John 18: 36-19: 7.[41] That's almost nothing.

It is unreasonable to believe that we can reconstruct the original text through a few scattered pieces. Due to this insufficient number of manuscripts, we cannot recover the history of the text.[42] Logically, we can say too, as Bowers stated before, that "The possibility exists that the extant copies (when few) do not accurately represent the original proportion."[43]

5. Comfort believes that the papyri of the early centuries preserved the original text, but scholars already revealed that the manuscripts of the first three centuries are witnesses for the three text-types: the Alexandrian, the Western (P^{29}, P^{38}, P^{48}, and P^{69}) and the Caesarean (P^{45}),[44] (maybe also a scarce number of Byzantine readings).
   J. H. Petzer concluded his essay "The papyri and New Testament Textual Criticism, Clarity or Confusion?" by declaring that the huge number of the unearthed papyri discovered throughout the last century did not pave the way straight to the final goal of New Testament textual criticism, for instead of bringing greater clarity, they have brought greater confusion.[45] These old copies added more confusion to the scholars' perception of the history of the text.
6. Comfort himself could not deny the awful truth: "the oxyrhynchus New Testament has *variegated* textual characters" [46] and that "the few

40 Maurice A. Robinson, "Review: Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett, eds., The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts: A Corrected, Enlarged Edition of The Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts," in *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*; 2001, Vol. 6

41 See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p.82

42See J. H. Petzer, "The Papyri and New Testament Textual Criticism, Clarity or Confusion?" p. 23

43 Fredson Bowers, *Bibliography and Textual Criticism*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1964, p. 75

44 See Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, Descriptions and Texts of Twelve Manuscripts on Papyrus of the Greek Bible. Fasciculus II, The Gospels and Acts (Text)*, London: E. Walker, 1933

45 J. H. Petzer, "The Papyri and New Testament Textual Criticism, Clarity or Confusion?" p.29

46 Philip W. Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*, p.68

manuscripts[47] that do have overlap are P^5 and P^{22}, and P^{52} and P^{90}. The first pair is strikingly *dissimilar*." [48]

7. Comfort does not adopt the eclectic method; he thinks that "any early papyrus-supported reading (also having witness from other early manuscripts) is a viable testimony to the original text,"[49] but he was forced to be eclectic when he faced variants in the papyri.
8. Kenneth W. Clark concluded in his study on the P^{75} that this papyrus (early third century) "vividly portrays a fluid state of the text at about A. D. 200." And that "such a scribal freedom suggests that the Gospel text was little more stable than the oral tradition, and that we may be pursuing the retreating mirage of the "original text."[50]
Colwell portrays the situation of the early transmission of the text by declaring that the manuscript tradition of the New Testament progressed from being relatively uncontrolled to being rigorously controlled. He states that "The general nature of the text in the earliest period (to A.D. 300) has long been recognized as "wild," "uncontrolled," "unedited."[51]
J. K. Elliot, despite his reliance on the Alexandrian scribes' integrity, stated in his review of Comfort's book that "The Alexandrians may have been copying accurately, but the exemplars they were working from were already flawed."[52] The papyrus stage was the period in which the textual problems came into being,[53] so it is a witness for a varied text, not a single pure one.
9. In his review of Comfort's book *Early Manuscripts and Modern Translations of the New Testament,* Michael W. Holmes, despite his appreciation of the book's method, mentioned that some early papyri used by Comfort are practically "of no significance," because they were poorly copied, while others, which are later witnesses, are excluded

47 The one produced in Oxyrhynchus (a city in Upper Egypt).

48 Ibid., p.67 [italics mine].

49 Philip W. Comfort, *The Quest*, p.127

50 Kenneth W. Clark, "The Theological Relevance of Textual Variation in Current Criticism of the Greek New Testament," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (Mar., 1966), p.15

51 Colwell, "Hort Redivivus: A Plea and a Program," in *Studies in Methodology*, Leiden: Brill, 1969, p.164

52 J. K. Elliott, Reviewed work(s): "The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament" by Philip Wesley Comfort, in *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 36, Fasc. 3 (Jul., 1994), p.285

53 See Frederic George Kenyon, Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, p.35

because of their age, despite their importance as direct copies of very early good manuscripts.[54]

One of the aspects of Comfort's simplistic method in using the papyri to reconstruct the "original text" is his disregard of the evaluation of each papyrus as an independent unit. The papyri, as a matter of fact, should be classified as good and bad papyri, not to be accepted as a whole trustworthy set.

10. Comfort acknowledges that some books of the New Testament were corrupted (redacted) too early (e.g. Acts, most of the Pauline epistles …)[55] , so we cannot get access to the pre-redacted text because our manuscripts do not allow us to go beyond the second century.
11. Comfort states that the early manuscripts found in Egypt should be seen as pure text because the scribes were following the rigid system of copying the manuscripts as had already been established in the pagan library of Alexandria. He claimed that "the Alexandrians were concerned with preserving the original text of literary works." [56]

I think that it is impossible to convince modern scholars with this argument, because, although they agree that Origen, head of the Alexandrian school, was a pioneer in textual criticism of the New Testament, they note, too, that his method leaves the modern scholar "disappointed" in him as a textual critic.[57]

Metzger commented on Origen's treatment of the variant readings, which he mentioned in his extant writings, that it "is most unsatisfactory from the standpoint of modern textual criticism. He combines a remarkable indifference to what are now regarded as important aspects of textual criticism with a quite uncritical method of dealing with them."[58]

54 See Michael W. Holmes, Reviewed work(s): "Early Manuscripts and Modern Translations of the New Testament by Philip W. Comfort," in *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 56, No. 1, Celebrating and Examining W. F. Albright (Mar., 1993), p.49

55 See Philip W. Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*, pp.19-20

56 Ibid., p. 22

57 L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974, p.94

58 Bruce M. Metzger, "Explicit References in the Works of Origen to Variant Readings in New Testament Manuscripts," in J. N. Birdsall and R. W. Thomson, eds. *Biblical and Patristic Studies: In Memory of Robert Pierce*, New York: Herder, 1963, pp.93-4

Origen himself was enraged by the scribal habits of his time. He declared furiously: "it is a recognized fact that there is much diversity in our copies, whether by the carelessness of certain scribes, or by some culpable rashness in the correction of the text, or by some people making arbitrary additions or omissions in their corrections."[59]

James R. Royse finds it easy to conclude that "substantial early papyri show just as clearly that as a rule early scribes did not exercise the care evidenced in later transcriptions."[60] In a study made by him of the six extensive papyri from before the fourth century (P^{45}, P^{46}, P^{47}, P^{66}, P^{72}, and P^{75}), he offers the following number of corrupted texts and words:[61]

	P^{45}	P^{46}	P^{47}	P^{66}	P^{72}	P^{75}
Additions	28	55	5	14	16	12
Omissions	63	167	18	19	29	41
Net words lost	102	283	43	22	27	53
Significant singulars[62]	222	471	51	107	98	119
Words lost per significant singular	46	60	84	21	28	45

12. The majority of textual critics today adopt the eclectic method in the hunt for the original/earliest possible text, which shows that the oldest manuscripts do not give us an easy or pure text.

The situation is complicated to the point that many[63] of the verses preferred in the UBS^4/NA^{27} (The twenty-seventh edition of the Greek New Testament text named after its primary editors, Eberhard Nestle and Kurt Aland) are not available in any extant manuscripts. Maurice Robinson offers us the following examples:

59 Origen, *Comm. Matt*. 15.14

60 James R. Royse, "Scribal Tendencies in the Transmission of the Text," in Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes, eds. *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research, Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, p.248

61 Ibid., p.246

62 "These are defined as those singular readings that remain after exclusion of nonsense readings and orthographic variants."

63 When interviewed by David Alan Black (2006), Maurice Robinson said that in a forthcoming essay, he would provide "105 whole verses of NA27/UBS4 which, when tabulated as whole-verse units, lack support from any ms, version, or Church Father within transmissional history."

http://www.daveblackonline.com/interview_with_maurice_robinson2.htm (8/13/2011)

a. Matthew 20:23 contains seven variant units, only three of which (the first, second, and sixth) are sufficient to leave the resultant text of NA^{27}/UBS^{4} with *no* support.
b. Luke 6:26 contains five variant units, which together leave the NA^{27} text without support.
c. Mark 11:3 contains but *two* variant units, in which the witnesses to the NA^{27}/UBS^{4} text are mutually exclusive (variant 1, *text* = B D 2427 *pc*; variant 2, *text* = א D L 579 892 1241 *pc*).
d. John 6:23, with four variant units, needs but the second and third to produce a NA^{27}/UBS^{4} verse with no support.[64]

William L. Petersen, in his review of Comfort's book, gave it the kiss of death when he declared that "This volume cannot be recommended, for it is riddled with *defects of every sort* […] In short, Comfort's acquaintance with both the literature of textual criticism and its issues is utterly *inadequate*. […] This book, with its *Abfall Theorie of textual origins* (a view as discredited in textual matters as it is in issues of Church history), serves as an example of a particular genre of *pseudo-scholarship*, which finds its way into certain schools and churches and then into students. This is unfortunate, for the unlearning of this volume's half-truths and outright untruths will be a painful experience for the student and an unwarranted waste of time for the professor. The publisher and external reviewers are to be rebuked for allowing such nonsense into print."[65]

Conclusion

A close look at the real condition of the manuscripts will help us understand better that the satisfactory quantity of the manuscripts cannot veil the deficiency of their quality, and that without a plausible quality, we will be forever distant from the lost autograph.

64 Maurice A. Robinson, "The Case for Byzantine Priority," p.536

65 William L. Petersen, Review: "The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament," by Philip Wesley Comfort, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 113, No. 3 (Autumn, 1994), pp.530-31 [italics mine] .

Why We Cannot Trust the New Testament Versions

... the early versions, which in themselves supply most important aid for the determination of the true New Testament text.

—George Milligan, *The New Testament documents: their origin and early history*, p.198

With a heated and proud tone, Wallace wrote, when enumerating the witnesses for an attainable original text, "It is not just the Greek MSS that count, either. Early on, the NT was translated into a variety of languages – Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, Gothic, Ethiopic, Armenian. There are more than 10.000 Latin MSS alone. No one really knows the total number of all these ancient versions, but the best estimates are close to 5.000—plus the 10.000 in Latin."[1] It is strange to read such a statement from a scholar who is the most stubborn enemy of the Majority text theory, and who is accused of being an opponent of a very tiny minority of manuscripts (Greek and translations). The number of manuscripts containing New Testament translations is not that high if compared with the estimated number of the manuscripts of the Qur'ān (the Holy book of Muslims), written almost six centuries after the composition of the New Testament books. The number of Qur'ānic manuscripts is estimated at one quarter of a million,[2] but still Wallace doubts the integrity of the Qur'ānic text.[3] So again, Wallace does not think numbers can be a guaranty for the originality of a text.

Let us go back to our starting point and directly pose the question we wish to investigate: Can we recover the "original text" through the New Testament translations? We can give a brief answer to this question, and a detailed one.

1 Daniel B. Wallace, *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament*, p.28

2 M. M. al-Azami, The *History of the Qur'ānic Text, from revelation to compilation, a comparative study with the Old and New Testaments*, second edition, Riyadh: Azami Publishing House, 2008, p.347

3 Daniel B. Wallace, *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament*, p.34

The brief answer is “certainly not,” because there is a scholarly consensus that the New Testament versions are less helpful in recovering the original text; they suffer from the same weakness as the Greek manuscripts, in addition to their own inherent deficiencies.

The detailed answer is that we are unable to restore the “original text” due to the multiple reasons detailed below.

First: We have no version that claims that it is copied from the autograph.

Second: We have no version that is identical to any modern critical text of the New Testament. All of them are less valuable than our created texts.

Third: The versions of the New Testament are witnesses for the four divergent text-types, so how can we use them to rebuild ONE original text?!

Fourth: The versions of the New Testament are not identical; they suffer from the conflicting readings found in the manuscripts.

Fifth: There are different readings, even in the versions of the same language (e.g. the old Syriac and the *Peshitta*, the old Latin and the *Vulgate*, the various Arabic versions).

Sixth: “None of the original manuscripts of the versions is extant, and therefore existing manuscripts must be subjected to textual criticism to determine the original text as nearly as possible.”[4] So we are back to face the troublesome problem of the “original text,” but this time we need to reach an original text of a version to help us to reach the “original text” of the author.

Seventh: The famous Italian adage says: “traduttore, traditore” (“translator, traitor”). This is not a condemnation of the translators, but rather, a recognition of the limitation of the “other” languages to give an exact rendition of the original.

There is no language that has the exact features of the Koine Greek (the Greek dialect used between 300 BC–300 AD) used by the New Testament authors. We can cite as an example the Syriac language. Sebastian P. Brock, one of the *foremost* authorities on *Syriac today, after enumerating the differences between the two languages and using quotations from the New Testament as examples, concluded by giving a significant statement about the evaluation of the New Testament version in the reconstruction of the original text,* “It will have been seen from the above examples that, while

4 D. A. Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide*, p.23

there are certain variations in Greek which cannot be represented in Syriac, the most problematical cases, from the text critical point of view, are those where the Syriac at first sight appears formally to support a Greek variant; here a closer examination, taking into account *over-all usage* in a particular version and book, will often indicate that formal identity can by no means be used as evidence that the Syriac supports the Greek variant in question."[5]

Eighth: The Diatessaron of Tatian is considered as the earliest translation of the New Testament (second half of the second century)[6], but this version is not helpful in pursuing the original text of the New Testament; for several reasons:

- No copy of the Diatessaron has survived. Scholars are trying to restore its text through its different translations and mainly by collecting the old authors' citations.
- Its original language is unknown; it has been argued that the Diatessaron was first made in Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, and Arabic.[7]
- The Diatessaron is a Gospel Harmony; it is a combination of the Gospels into a single narrative, which was accomplished by resolving the apparent contradictions of the four Gospels by creating its own narrative that does not follow any canonical gospel.
- We know nothing definite about the methodology of the harmonization and the translation, save what the text reveals.
- The Diatessaron does not mention the sources of its sequences, which failure is preventing us from realizing the exact words (esp. in the synoptic Gospels) behind it.
- The Diatessaron does not reflect the image of the Greek "text" of the second century; "the vorlage [the underlying text] from which Tatian worked had a textual complexion closer to that of the Vetus Syra [Old Syriac] and Vetus Latina [Old Latin], rather than Greek."[8]

5 Sebastian P. Brock, "Limitations of Syriac in Representing Greek," in Bruce Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament, Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations*, Oxford: University Press, 2001, p.98

6 See William L. Petersen, "The Diatessaron of Tatian," in Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes, eds. *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research, Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, p.77

7 Ibid., p.77

8 William. L. Petersen, "The Genesis of the Gospels," p.41

• What are the sources of the Diatessaron? William L. Petersen answers by saying, “As for Tatian’s sources. It is difficult to determine whether he used a bona fide extracanonical gospel or only a deviating canonical gospel that, because of the early date, had not yet evolved into the canonical form we know today in the great uncials of the fourth century. What is undeniable, however, is that the Diatessaron contains readings that are now ‘nonstandard’ (e.g., the ‘light’ at Jesus’ baptism) and that are attributed to an extracanonical, Judaic-Christian gospel by ancient ecclesiastical writers (e.g., Epiphanius).”[9]

• The eastern Diatessaronic witnesses differ notably from Western Diatessaronic witnesses.[10]

• There are differences between the Diatessaronic witnesses of the same languages; i.e., we have two different forms of Arabic Diatessaron, so many that Kahl declared that “We cannot derive one of these forms from the other and cannot reconstruct an 'Urtext' of the Arabic Diatessaron from them. They must be dealt with separately.”[11]

• Tatian was considered by Irenaeus as a heretic early on, and this disagreeable reputation was perpetuated without dispute by many later Western writers, such as Tertullian, Hippolytus, Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Jerome.[12]

Ninth: All the other versions are secondary except the Syriac, Latin, and Coptic.[13]

The Syriac Version

The pre-sixth century Syriac versions (if we leave out the Diatessaron because of its unknown origin) are 1, the Old Syriac, and 2, the Peshitta.

1. The Old Syriac. The Diatessaron was used as the standard Gospel text for some Syriac-speaking churches up to the fifth century; in the

9 Ibid., p.91

10 See ibid., pp.78-79, F. C. Burkitt, “Tatian’s Diatessaron and the Dutch Harmonies,” in *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1924) pp.113-30

11 Paul E. Kahle, The Cairo Geniza, London: 1947, pp.211-28; second ed. Oxford: 1959, p.313 (Quoted by Bruce Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament, Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations*, p.16)

12 See Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, eds., *A Companion to Second-century Christian Heretics*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, p.153

13 See Kirsopp Lake, *The Text of the New Testament, revised by Silva New*, sixth edition, London: Rivingtons, 1928, p. 24; Frederik Wisse, “The Coptic Versions of the New Testament,” in Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes, eds. *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, p.131

meantime, the Syriac Church produced Syriac translations for the separated Gospels. These translations were unknown to scholars until the nineteenth century, when two different manuscripts were found: Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Curetonianus. Both of these date from the late fourth or early fifth century. The difficulties of these two translations that prevent both of them from assisting us in our search for the lost autograph are as follows:

- We know nothing about the *history* of these two mysterious translations.
- They are not identical.
- The two codices contain only parts of the Gospels.
- The Codex Sinaiticus has some illegible texts because it is a palimpsest (a manuscript on which an earlier text has been effaced and used again.)[14]

2. The Peshitta: The first known Syriac translation of the New Testament (not just the Gospels) is the one called "Peshitta" "ܦܫܝܛܬܐ" (simple).

The questions of *when, how,* and *why* do not have definite answers here either. Metzger viewed them so pessimistically that he dared to say, "The question who it was that produced the Peshitta version of the New Testament *will perhaps never be answered*."[15]

The Latin Version

There are two Latin versions, known as the Old Latin, and the Vulgate.

1. The Old Latin

The Old Latin versions of the New Testament are the Latin translations made before Jerome's Vulgate. The main deficiencies of the Old Latin version that make us unable to restore the original text of the New Testament through it are as follows:

- We have different groups of Old Latin translations, and we do not know if they go back to one original version or not. [16]
- The Old Latin texts represent, on the whole, the Western text-type, not the Alexandrian.[17]

14 See W. D. McHardy, "Disputed Readings in the Sinaitic Syriac Palimpsest," in *Journal of Theological Studies* xlv (1944), pp.170-74

15 Bruce Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament, Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations*, p.124 [italics mine].

16 See Kirsopp Lake, *The text of the New Testament*, p. 28

- The Old Latin version reflects the earliest dynamic corruption of the New Testament. Metzger declared firmly that "The diversity among the Old Latin witnesses is probably to be accounted for on the assumption that scribes, instead of transmitting the manuscripts mechanically, allowed themselves considerable freedom in incorporating their own and others' traditions. In other words, the Old Latin was *a living creation, constantly growing*."[18]
- There is an appalling diversity in the Old Latin manuscripts. Saint Jerome exemplified this view with a furious exclamation when Pope Damasus I asked him to revise the Old Latin gospels, declaring, "There are almost as many forms of text as there are manuscripts."[19] Saint Augustine expresses his annoyance by referring to the "endless variety and multitude of Latin translators."[20] The reason for this *désagréable* phenomenon is, as Saint Jerome said, the "inaccurate translators, and the blundering alterations of confident but ignorant critics, and, further, all that has been inserted or changed by copyists more asleep than awake."[21]
- The only known Latin translation that can be dated to the second century is what we can find in Tertullian's writings, but it is of little value in tracing the history of the Latin version because Tertullian made it, as many scholars believe, by himself from Greek,[22] and it does not fit into the rest of the Latin tradition.[23]
- The Latin version, as mentioned by Fisher, does not have any direct bearing on the "original" text (autograph) of the New Testament. It is much too late for that. Its only value is as a direct witness for the history of the Greek text.[24]

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17 See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 15*

18 Bruce Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament, Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations*, p.325 [italics mine].

19 Jerome, *Ep. Praef. Evang., to Damasus*

20 Augustine, *Retractationes*, i, 21, 3

21 Jerome, *Ep. Praef. Evang., to Damasus*

22 See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p.186

23 J. H. Petzer, "The Latin Version of the New Testament," in Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes, eds. The *Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research, Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, p.126

24 J. H. Petzer, "The Latin Version of the New Testament," p.124

- Most probably, no pure old Latin manuscript has survived, and (almost) all that we possess today have been contaminated to some extent by Vulgate readings.[25]

2. The Vulgate

Saint Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damasus I in 382 A.D. to make a revision of the old Latin translations. He translated into Latin the Old Testament (except the books of Wisdom, Sirach, and Maccabees) and the four Gospels; the rest of the New Testament was translated by an unknown person(s). It became the definitive and officially *promulgated Latin version of the Bible in the Catholic Church.* The problems with the Vulgate are as follows:

- It was composed at a very late date.
- The consensus of scholars today favors the view that the Greek text underlying the Vulgate was *Byzantine*.[26]
- The Vulgate suffered the same corruption as that of the Greek manuscripts.
- There was a huge influence of the Old Latin on the manuscripts of the Vulgate.[27]
- Certain readings in the Vulgate are not known to us in any extant Greek manuscript. For instance, Saint Jerome gives "docebit vos omnem veritatem" in John 16: 13, whereas our present Greek editions read "ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάσῃ," so that he would seem to have read "διηγήσεται ὑμῖν ἐν τὴν ἀλήθειαν πᾶσαν."[28]

The Coptic Version

The Coptic version suffers from the same defects as the Latin versions. According to Fredrik Wisse, none of the New Testament papyrus fragments found in Egypt, dated before the fourth century, were in Coptic. He tells us that Coptic manuscript attestation only became substantial and representative of most of the New Testament writings in the late fourth and fifth centuries and that even then, "the witnesses represent a wide array of Coptic dialects and independent traditions […]. This suggests that the early history of

25 See ibid., p.119

26 See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p.192

27 See Kirsopp Lake, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 31

28 Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament*, p.124

transmission of the Coptic text of the NT long remained *fluid and haphazard*."[29]

Bruce Metzger refers to the failure of the manuscripts to provide an identical text: "The earlier manuscripts present a wide spectrum of variant readings, a few of which are preserved in the later standardized texts. The textual affinities of the Sahidic and Bohairic versions have been the subject of not a few analyses, some more refined than others. On the basis of collations prepared by Johannes Leipoldt, von Soden found that both the major Coptic versions belong predominantly to the Hesychian recension, though during their transmission they suffered contamination in different degrees from the Koine recension."[30] Despite the fact that the Sahidic and Bohairic versions show an underlying Alexandrian text, the Greek original of the Sahidic version was quite different from that of the Bohairic version;[31] moreover, they include a considerable number of Western readings.[32]

Conclusion

If we should believe Eberhard Nestle's statement about the worth of the versions, "The value of their testimony depends on their age and fidelity,"[33] we have to declare with certitude that these versions are unable to take us to the original text due to their late dates of composition and the lack of serious signs for their fidelity to a perished autograph.

29 Frederik Wisse, "The Coptic Versions of the New Testament," in Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes, eds. *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research, Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, p.133 [italics mine].

30 Bruce Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament, Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations*, p.133

31 Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament*, p.135

32 Frederik Wisse, *The Coptic Versions of the New Testament*, p.137

33 Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction*, p.93

Can We Really Restore the *Original* New Testament through Patristic Citations?

Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.
— Proverbs 25:14

Conservative Christians take pleasure in repeating the familiar apologetic assertion that one of the easiest ways to prove the authenticity of the New Testament text is reconstructing it through the patristic citations available in the extant books written by the Fathers of the Church. Unfortunately, no Christian scholar actually proved that to us; it is until now a mere allegation.

The Bible defenders misused the words of the New Testament textual scholar Bruce Metzger, as quoted by the apologist propagandist Lee Strobel in his oversimplified book, *The Case For Christ*[1]: "even if we lost all the Greek manuscripts and the early translations, we could still reproduce the contents of the New Testament from the multiplicity of quotations in commentaries, sermons, letters, and so forth of the early Church Fathers."[2] Does this declaration have any virtual weight?

The Deceptive Challenge

The failure of the Church in recovering the original text of the New Testament did not prevent its arrogant assertions. In a climate where churchgoers know almost nothing about the sacred books, it is easy to make any hollow lie out of clay. The Christian apologists inaugurate a challenge that claims that even if we lost the New Testament manuscripts, we can rebuild the original text only by using the patristic citations. Here these apologists are clearly trying to deceive.

1 See for counter rebuttals to Strobel's assertions, Robert M. Price, *The Case Against The Case For Christ: A New Testament Scholar Refutes the Reverend Lee Strobel*, Cranford, N.J.: American Atheist Press, 2010; Earl Doherty, *Challenging the Verdict: a Cross-examination of Lee Strobel's "The Case for Christ,"* Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2001

2 Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, p. 76. It was stated previously by Metzger in his book *The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, p.126

First, from a chronological perspective, there are two definitions of the term *Fathers of the Church.*

1. The Roman Catholic definition stated generally that John of Damascus, who lived in the eighth century, is the last Father.[3]
2. The Eastern Orthodox Church extends the scope, denying a time limit for it, by including later influential writers to the Fathers list.[4]

In the field of textual criticism, scholars do not abide by the time limit of the Catholic Church and do not favor the Eastern Church's choice. The list of the Fathers used as witnesses reaches its end two centuries before the Renaissance. We note this in the UBS[3] edition, where the last Father lived in the twelfth century.[5]

Century	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**
Fathers	22	22	59	59	20	6	8	6	2	1	2

This mega-list includes a number of "heretics" too, such as Marcion, who is considered to be one of the most important Fathers of the second century.[6] The dramatic challenge posed by the Christian apologetics makes no sense if we accept this inflated list. Moreover, even if we accept the Catholic definition, the challenge will appear senseless, because collecting parts of a book across that long period will not prove the originality of these pieces. It will be a mere parti-colored text(s).

Second, none of the opponents of the Church asked that the recovery of the New Testament text be done solely with the help of the Fathers, and there

3 Some extended it to late centuries; we read in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton, 1909, 6/1): "It is frequently said that St. Bernard (d. 1153) was the last of the Fathers, and Migne's "Patrologia Latina" extends to Innocent III, halting only on the verge of the thirteenth century, while his "Patrologia Graeca" goes as far as the Council of Florence (1438-9). These limits are evidently too wide."

4 "…the patristic period is generally held to be closed with St. Isidore of Seville in the West and St. John of Damascus in the East. Among the Eastern Orthodox, however, no such limitation is found." (art. "Fathers of the Church," F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, third edition by E. A. Livingstone, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.600)

5 This list is taken from James Price, *King James Onlyism: A New Sect*, Singapore: James D. Price Publisher, 2006, p.177. The Church Fathers whose eras are unknown are not included. Daniel B. Wallace extends the list one more century (Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, p.83).

6 Paul D. Wegner lists Marcion as the first father, chronologically, in his list of "Prominent Church Fathers." (Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results*, p.237)

is no factual need for that. We know that it is possible to reconstruct a *text* of the New Testament using the manuscripts of the first fourth century, so why should we ask that same task be performed using the patristic citations?! Scholars agree that priority should be given to the Greek manuscripts in the process of restoring the original text, or the closest one to it. And we know, on the other hand, that many of the leaders of the textual critic discipline admit that we are not able, and may be forever unable, to recover the original text. Therefore, how could we possibly imagine that we could reconstruct the autograph with the help of the poor Church Fathers' citations, when we are unable to reach that goal with the Greek manuscripts, the versions, and the Church Fathers' citations?!

The dramatic challenge made by the conservative scholars could be likened to one made by a scrawny man who has been defeated by an enemy, yet claims that he could crush him even without using all of his strength. He has already lost the fight, but pretends that he can re-win it even with less effort!?

Third, the real challenge is not to collect the verses of "a" text of the New Testament; rather, it is to assemble the verses of the "original" text: the same phrases written by the so-called "inerrant authors, inspired by God." The citations of the Church Fathers provide us "a text," or more accurately, "texts," but we are not searching for "a text" or "texts," we are diligently hunting for "the real text," the original words, the source of the copies. No one has taken up our challenge yet.

Fourth, what we are asking the Church to provide is the exact text written by the one author who the Church believes wrote the word of God, the exact word, the uncorrupted word. And there is no way to provide that text unless . . .

A. We find the original manuscript, and prove that its text was not changed, or

B. The Church presents the unbroken chains of narrators that start from the authors to the subsequent generations, showing that every word in each book is written by the canonical author.

Sadly, we cannot achieve the first option, and the Church does not seem to have ever thought of the second one, so it will never be able to fulfill it. The apologists' challenge is wholly unjustified, and it offers an unasked help.

Why Use the Patristic Citations?

The patristic citations were used by scholars to accomplish two tasks: reaching the original/best attainable text, and having better knowledge of the readings in certain geographical areas in specified times. These citations

were helpful in giving us a closer look at the map of the readings in the course of history, but they failed in achieving the other task (original text); they provide, as Ehrman affirms, "primary evidence for the history of the text but only secondary evidence for the original text itself." [7]

The Church Fathers' citations, as is obvious from the textual critic textbooks, are third in order in the list of sources for the work of constructing the modern critical texts, after the Greek manuscripts and the versions.[8] The practical worth of the patristic citations in our march toward the original text is *complementary*, and that is one of the main reasons for their being neglected by scholars for the past centuries, compared with the Greek manuscripts.[9]

Charles Hammond made it clearer when he stated that "the value of even the most definite Patristic citation is only *corroborative*. Standing by itself, any such citation might mean no more than that *the writer found the passage in his own copy, or in those examined by him*, in the form in which he quotes it."[10] All scholars share the same opinion, because the Church Fathers' citations cannot surpass that limit, and thus these citations need constant support from the Greek manuscripts and perhaps the versions too. Moreover, if we check the UBS[4] we will not come across any reading supported solely by the Church Fathers' citations.

The undisputed inability of the Church Fathers' citations to support by themselves a variant reading led scholars to launch waves of attacks against the French scholar Marie-Émile Boismard when he made the odd decision to prefer the Church Fathers' citations variant readings against the Greek manuscripts' ones when he worked on reconstructing the oldest attainable text of the Gospel of John.[11]

7 Bart Ehrman, *Didymus the Blind and the Text of the Gospels*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986, p.5

8 See Gordon D. Fee, "The Use of Greek Patristic Citations in New Testament Textual Criticism: the State of the Question," in Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee, eds. *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993, p.344

9 See Bart Ehrman, "The Use and Significance of Patristic Evidence for NT Textual Criticism," in Barbara Aland and Joël Delobel, eds. *New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis and Early Church History: A Discussion of Methods*, p.118

10 Charles Hammond, *Outlines of Textual Criticism Applied to the New Testament*, second edition, Oxford: The Clarendon press, 1872, p.61 [italics mine].

11 See Gordon D. Fee, "The Text of John in the Jerusalem Bible: A Critique of the Use of Patristic

What about the Apostolic Fathers' Quotations?

The Apostolic Fathers is a title given since the seventeenth century to the group of authors who lived at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, and who are supposed to have had personal relations with some of the Apostles.[12]

The Apostolic Fathers' quotations are the only *possible* serious source that can allow us to really approach the original text of the New Testament, so it is particularly important to critically study these quotations. We should give the earlier Fathers a chance to save the Christian apologists' happy wish.

Scholars' Standpoint

It would be beneficial for the reader to rapidly review scholars' positions about the value of the apostolic Fathers' quotations before getting into their details.

As pertains to quantity:

- Vincent Taylor: "Until about A.D. 150 the quotations are of little value for textual purposes."[13]
- Frederic George Kenyon: "Quotations from the New Testament are found in the earliest writers of the sub-apostolic age, but they are so scanty as to be of little service for our present purpose."[14]
- A. T. Robertson: "Little help is gained from the Greek Apostolic Fathers for the text."[15]

As pertains to quality:

- Bruce Metzger: "The Apostolic Fathers seldom make express citations from New Testament writings."[16]

Citations in New Testament Textual Criticism," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (June 1971), pp.163-73, Bruce Metzger, "Patristic Evidence and the Textual Criticism of the New Testament," in *New Testament Studies*, vol. 18, 1972-1973, pp.379–400, Bart Ehrman, *Didymus the Blind and the Text of the Gospels*, pp.4-5

12 See F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.90; Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament, Its Origin, Development, and Significance*, Oxford: Clarendon Press,1997, p.39; J. B. Peterson, "The Apostolic Fathers," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907, 1/637

13 Vincent Taylor, *The Text of the New Testament, A Short Introduction*, London: Macmillan, 1961, p.40

14 Frederic George Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p.209

15 A. T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1925, p.134

- Marvin R. Vincent: "The Apostolic Fathers are of little value for patristic quotation, since they do not so much quote as blend the language of the New Testament with their own."[17]
- William L. Petersen: "It is clear that the vast majority of passages in the Apostolic Fathers for which one can find likely parallels in the New Testament have *deviations* from our present, critically reconstructed New Testament text. It must be emphasized that the vast majority of these deviations are not minor (e.g., differences in spelling or verb tense), but major (a completely new context, a substantial interpolation or omission, a conflation of two entirely separate ideas and/or passages)."[18]
- Caspar René Gregory professes, despite his apologetic tone, that "the very earliest of the Christian writers did not make a point of quoting the New Testament with any precision."[19]

A Close Examination of the Apostolic Fathers' Quotations

In 1905, a Committee of the Oxford Society of Historical Theology published an interesting book titled *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* in which it collected all that seems, at first glance, to be quotations from the New Testament in the preserved writings of the Apostolic Fathers. The Committee then commented on these supposed quotations.[20]

We will commence our investigation with the data included in the Committee study so as not to be accused of subjectivism. We will scrutinize the "quotations" from quantitative and qualitative angles to be able to judge the value of the Apostolic Fathers' quotations in restoring the desired text of the New Testament.

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16 Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament, Its Origin, Development, and Significance*, p.40

17 See Marvin R. Vincent, *A History of the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1899, p.38

18 William L. Petersen, "Textual Traditions Examined: What the Text of the Apostolic Fathers tells us about the Text of the New Testament in the Second Century," in Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett, eds. *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.33

19 Caspar René Gregory, *Canon and Text of the New Testament*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1907, p.425

20 "The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers" is a centenary book celebrating the volume "The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers," published by A Committee of the Oxford Society of Historical Theology at Clarendon Press in 1905. William L. Petersen declared in it that "the core of the committee's remarks and commentary remain valid a century later," explaining that by stating, "The reason for their timelessness is the fact that they are based on empirical observation, not ideological, theological cant." (William L. Petersen, Textual Traditions Examined: What the Text of the Apostolic Fathers tells us about the Text of the New Testament in the Second Century, p.39)

Weighing the Apostolic Fathers' Quotations as a Quantity

By collecting all the New Testament verses stored in *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, we can find out the percentage of the preserved text of each book of the New Testament in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.

	Number of verses	%
Matthew	100	9%
Mark	30	4%
Luke	56	5%
John	22	3%
Acts	14	1%
Romans	28	6%
1 Corinthians	66	15%
2 Corinthians	17	7%
Galatians	13	9%
Ephesians	47	30%
Philippians	13	12%
Colossians	21	22%
1Thessalonians	3	3%
2Thessalonians	3	6%
1Timothy	21	18%
2Timothy	13	16%
Titus	9	19%
Philemon	1	4%
Hebrews	74	24%
James	25	23%
1Peter	41	39%
2Peter	1	2%
1John	2	2%
2John	1	8%
3John	0	0%
Jude	1	4%
Revelation	6	1%

The result: We possess only eight percent of the text of the New Testament through the Apostolic Father quotations. And that is a miniscule quantity of the preserved text at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century.

Weighing the Apostolic Fathers Quotations as a Quality

First: It was not mentioned in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers that these supposed "citations" are taken from the original text, or a copy of the autograph. These so-called "citations" are not quotes; they are, in fact, texts close in their meanings or message to parallel texts in the canonical books. We are not looking here for such texts to rebuild the original text; we are in search for texts quoted by the Apostolic Fathers from the autograph of the sacred books or taken directly from their authors.

Second: The Committee of the Oxford Society of Historical Theology arranged the citations in an order of probability: (a), (b), (c), and (d). The class (a) includes the passages "about which there can be no reasonable doubt." In all the other passages, there is a degree of doubt about their inclusion in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.

The passages that are given the symbol (a) are very few:

Clement of Rome

Clement 35:5.6	Romans 2:29-32
Clement 37:5; 38:1	1Corinthians 12:12, 14, 21
Clement 47:5	1Corinthians 1:11-13
Clement 49:5	1Corinthians 13:4-7
Clement 36:2-5	Hebrews 1:1-14

Polycarp

Polycarp 5:3	1Corinthians 9:6
Polycarp 11:2	1Corinthians 6:2
Polycarp 1:3	1Peter 1:8
Polycarp 8:1, 2	1Peter 2:21
Polycarp 10:2	1Peter 2:12

Third: The committee itself disvalued the passages with an (a) rating as helpful citations[21] to restore the original text of the New Testament.

21 Following Gordon Fee's terminology (1972), scholars distinguish between "citation," "allusion," and "adaptation." Allusion: Reference to the content of a biblical passage in which verbal correspondence to the New Testament Greek text is so remote as to offer no value for the reconstruction

• The committee said about the quotations of Clement of Rome from Romans and 1Corinthians: "Even in the case of N. T. works which as it appears to us were certainly known and used by Clement, such as Romans and 1Corinthians, the citations are loose and inexact."[22]

• The committee described the quotation from the first chapter of the letter to the Hebrews as "reminiscence,"[23] and that is something easy to notice if we accept that Clement had in mind that letter, due to the difference of size of the two texts (the text alluded to in Hebrews is three times bigger that the "allusion" made by Clement).

• It was acknowledged by the committee concerning Polycarp 5:3=1Corinthians 6:9 that Polycarp had omitted words from the quoted text, and that "the quotation was probably therefore made from memory."[24] The loose citation minimizes to a great extent the possibility of recovering the exact text used by Polycarp.

• After the assertion of the committee concerning Polycarp 11:2= 1Corinthians 6:2, that we possess Polycarp passage only in Latin translation, we remain far away from the exact text we are seeking.

• The committee declared that 1Peter 1:8 text was "presupposed" by Polycarp[25] which, in itself is recognition that Polycarp did not copy the exact text that he had in his manuscript from the New Testament.

• Concerning Polycarp 8:1,2=1Peter 2:21, the committee said that "variations of order and the occasional verbal differences should be noticed."[26]

• We have only the Latin translation of Polycarp 10:2, and it is not identical to 1Peter 2:12.

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of that text. Adaptation: Reference to a biblical passage, which exhibits verbal correspondence to the Greek New Testament, but which has been adapted to fit the Father's discussion and/or syntax. Citation: Those places where a Father is consciously trying to cite, either from memory or by copying, the very words of the biblical text, although citations may be either "genuine" or "loose."

See Gordon D. Fee, "Text of John in Origen and Cyril of Alexandria: A Contribution to Methodology in the Recovery and Analysis of Patristic Citations," in *Biblica* 52 (1971), p.362; see for a critique, Carroll D. Osburn, "Methodology in Identifying Patristic Citations in NT Textual Criticism," in *Novum Testamentum*, Oct 2005, Vol. 47 Issue 4, pp. 313-43

22 A Committee of the Oxford Society of Historical Theology, *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905, p.37

23 See Ibid., p.46

24 See Ibid., p.85

25 Ibid., p.86

26 See Ibid., p.87

Fourth: Despite its huge and long apparatus, the UBS[4] did not allude to Clement of Rome or Polycarp in the places where the Oxford committee assigned an "a" to the texts. The UBS[4] could refer to Polycarp 1:3 as a text, preferring the variant reading "ἰδόντες," "you have seen" against "εἰδότες," "you have known" in 1Peter 1:8, but this negligence tells us that the team of the UBS[4] finds difficulty in seeing the Polycarp text as a citation.

Fifth: The UBS[4] and the NA[27] used only the following from the apostolic Fathers: Second Clement, Polycarp, and the Didache.

Sixth: We read in the introduction of the UBS[4] that the Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, Ignatius, and Clement of Rome, among a longer list, "offer no witness of significance for the critical apparatus of this edition."[27] NA[27] apparatus only referred to The Didache four times, all in Matthew, and to Clement, only once. That means that the apostolic Fathers helped hardly at all in reconstructing the best critical text.

Seventh: The credibility of the Apostolic writings lies in the close relationship between Jesus' disciples and the supposed authors of these books. The Didache cannot be taken as a reliable source for tradition received from Jesus' disciples, because it was written (as is the opinion of the majority of scholars) in the second half of the second century, by an unknown author who had not, obviously, met the disciples.[28]

We cannot take the Didache as a proof for the existence of the canonical Gospels as we know them today, even if we accept, for the sake of argument, that the Didache was written in the first century. This is because, due to the noticeable differences between the Didache text and our four Gospels, the opposite view should lead us to one of two options: either to believe that the text of the Gospels used by the Didachist was too different from the canonical version we know, or that the Didachist felt free to reshape Jesus' sayings by mingling them with extra-canonical material and attributing its words to himself, not to Jesus.[29]

Aaron Milavec, who is an authority in the Didache studies, insists after thorough and careful consideration that the Didache is totally independent of the Gospels in the internal logic, theological orientation, and pastoral

27 *The Greek New Testament*, fourth revision edition, p.34*

28 Johannes Betz attributed this point of view to the majority of scholars. (See Johannes Betz, "The Eucharist in the Didache," in Jonathan A. Draper, ed. *The Didache in Modern Research*, Leiden: Brill, 1996, p.244)

29 See William. L. Petersen, "The Genesis of the Gospels," p.53

practice that runs decisively counter to what one finds within the received Gospels.[30]

Eighth: The only extant book ascribed to Polycarp is his letter to the Philippians.[31] Scholars are debating the originality of this attribution.[32] Moreover, many scholars think that its text had been corrupted.[33]

Ninth: The second letter of Clement, whose title is "Κλήμεντος πρὸς Κορινθίους," is not really a letter, but a homily or discourse which was read in the meetings of the faithful believers,[34] and it was attributed to Clement, who lived at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second. The majority of scholars reject the authenticity of this writing. Thomas W. Crafer, in his *Letters* edition, said, "Though this treatise has been traditionally ascribed to Clement of Rome, its real authorship remains unknown."[35] All that we can deduce about the author is that he is a Greek speaking convert from a pagan environment.[36]

Tenth: After deep investigation, Helmut Koester stated that the similarities between the early Church Fathers' writings and the Gospels do not signify that these Fathers quoted from the New Testament, but rather that quotations hark back to the early oral tradition used by the early Fathers and the authors of the New Testament.[37] We cannot expect that these Fathers actually quoted from the books of the New Testament; we know that a fixed canon did not exist at that time. All that did exist was a common tradition that includes stories and sayings transmitted orally in addition to gospels, epistles, and other genres of religious books which were categorized later as "canonical" and "apocryphal."

30 See Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003, p.xiii

31 See Charles Evan Hill, *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp*, Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006, p.136

32 See Paul Hartog, *Polycarp and the New Testament: the Occasion, Rhetoric, Theme, and Unity of the Epistle to the Philippians and its Allusions to New Testament Literature*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002, p.70

33 Ibid., p.71

34 Joseph Tixeront, *A Handbook of Patrology*, St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1920, p.21

35 Thomas W. Crafer, ed. *The Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, London: Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921, p.v

36 See Bart Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: I Clement, II Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, p.158

37 See Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development*, Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990

Conclusion

The meticulous research into the writings called Apostolic leads us to a mortifying result: There is nothing that can be called "texts cited from the New Testament by the Apostolic Fathers." In other words, the Apostolic writings do no shed any *positive* light on the *obscure zone*. After this distressing failure to recover "a text" (not just the original text) from the Apostolic books, it would be futile to try to look for the original text in books of later authors, because of the huge time gap between the date of composition of the original and the dates of quotation. We will attempt, despite our conviction that this will not result in our reaching the desired goal, to recollect the fragments of the original text in the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers.

Is It Possible with the Pre-Nicene Fathers?

The Apologists' Claim on Trial

Scholars have been reading in the apologists' books for more than a century that it is possible to reconstruct the whole text of the New Testament (except 11 verses) from the writings of the pre-Nicene Fathers. No material proof has ever been given. We have heard only the story of a Scottish judge called David Dalrymple, known as "Lord Hailes" (1726-92 A.D.), who was able to reach that goal. The story reaches us through Robert Philip in his book *The Life, Times, And Missionary Enterprises of the Rev. John Campbell*. In that book Philip discusses what John Campbell reported that Walter Buchanan told him had happened between him and Dalrymple. Campbell said that, while Walter Buchanan was at a literary party, someone had posed a very curious question in which he wondered if the contents of all the New Testament could be recovered from the writings of the first three centuries if all the New Testament manuscripts had been destroyed at the end of the third century. None of the party even hazarded a guess.

Subsequently, Lord Hailes or Dalrymple told Buchanan that he had been intrigued by the question posed at the literary party two months previously and had collected all the writers of the New Testament of the first three centuries and reviewed their writings. He then announced to Buchanan that he had discovered that the whole New Testament could be recovered from those writings, except seven or perhaps, eleven verses. He concluded by saying that, "here was a way in which God concealed, or hid the treasure of his word, that Julian, the apostate emperor, and other enemies of Christ

who wished to extirpate the Gospel from the world, never would have thought of and though they had, they could never have effected their destruction".[38]

This story is quoted extensively in apologists' publications without its having been scrutinized or re-examined. Any claim that can be used to resuscitate the credibility of the Bible is out of question in conservative literature; that is why we should tackle the task using *numbers* and *percents*, along with defining the real nature of the results.

Refuting the Claim as Pertains to Quantity

Two researchers[39] actually looked for Lord Hailes' manuscripts concerning his project of collecting the text of the New Testament, to see the true result of Haile's dream. After finding them, they examined the numbers and the percentages of the verses found in the early Fathers' books, knowing that there were three different attempts to collect these verses. Here are the ultimate results:[40]

Book	Total Number Of Verses	Interleaved Collation		Supplemental Collation		Loose Leaf Collation	
		Number of verses missing	% verses missing	Number of verses missing	% verses missing	Number of verses missing	% verses missing
Matthew	1071	832	77.7%	454	42.4%	491	45.8%
Mark	678	666	98.2%	585	86.3%	Incomplete	Incomplete
Luke	1151	1084	94.2%	490	42.6%	-	-
John	879	788	89.6%	543	61.8%	Incomplete	Incomplete
Acts	1006	956	95.0%	703	69.9%	-	-
Romans	433	340	78.5%	156	36.0%	-	-
1Corinthians	437	328	75.1%	117	26.8%	-	-
2Corinthians	256	204	79.7%	139	54.3%	-	-

38 See R. Philip, *The Life, Times, And Missionary Enterprises of The Rev. John Campbell*, 1841, John Snow, Paternoster Row: London, pp.214–16

39 'Abdullah David and M. S. M. Saifullah.

40 See http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Bible/Text/citations.html (10/24/2010)

Galatians	149	120	80.5%	54	36.2%	-	-
Ephesians	155	138	89.0%	42	27.1%	-	-
Philippians	104	89	85.6%	49	47.1%	-	-
Colossians	95	75	78.9%	26	27.4%	62	65.3%
1Thessalonians	89	82	92.1%	50	56.1%	-	-
2Thessalonians	47	35	74.5%	22	46.8%	-	-
1 Timothy	113	84	74.3%	46	40.7%	-	-
2 Timothy	83	71	85.5%	43	51.8%	-	-
Titus	46	39	84.8%	25	54.3%	-	-
Philemon	25	25	100%	-	-	-	-
Hebrews	303	278	98.7%	-	-	238	78.5%
James	108	104	96.3%	-	-	101	93.5%
1Peter	105	88	83.8%	-	-	44	42.0%
2Peter	61	59	96.7%	-	-	59	96.7%
1John	105	95	89.4%	-	-	54	49.6%
2John	13	13	100%	-	-	10	77.0%
3John	14	14	100%	-	-	14	100%
Jude	25	25	100%	-	-	17	68.0%
Revelation	405	388	95.8%	-	-	230	56.8%
Total	7956	7020	88.2%				

Conclusion

The numbers in the previous chart tell us that in the most optimistic attempt of the three tries, the total of the missed verses in the writings of the Church Fathers of the first three centuries is 4.336, which equals fifty-four percent of the New Testament verses. This result is clearly incomplete; we are still missing almost half of the New Testament verses.

Refuting the Claim as Pertains to Quality

Dalrymple's story cannot be relied upon as evidence for the possibility of collecting the text of the New Testament, because it fails in an objective

trial to offer a convincing argument for the preservation of the whole or the majority of the New Testament passages. It therefore is not worthy of being considered as a historical witness and as a practical proof as the Christian apologists are proposing it is.

Our objections to the credibility of the story and its significance for the possibility of obtaining the actual word of the New Testament through the patristic citations are numerous. Here are some of them:

First: The story was not transmitted to us by David Dalrymple, or even by someone who had heard him tell it directly. Our narrator learned of it from someone who had heard Dalrymple tell it, and he gave his second-hand account of it after fifty years had elapsed since he had been told it.

Second: Dalrymple, a judge, was not qualified to undertake this painstaking project, since he was neither an expert in textual criticism nor in patristics. Moreover, the textual criticism discipline was at a fairly primitive stage in his time.

Third: The story in question claims that this gigantic work was done in just few months, which is unbelievable, even if we suppose that it had been done by a group of scholars. Furthermore, the dates in Dalrymple's manuscripts reveal that the project lasted for four or five years. This shows that the accuracy of the details of the story as related by John Campbell should not be taken as a given.[41]

Fourth: Scholars agree today that the printed texts of the Church Fathers' writings prior to the twentieth century were disappointingly edited, were based on defective manuscripts, and followed feeble methodologies.[42]

Fifth: With the absence of any distinction having been made between the "Citation," the "adaptation," and the "allusion," it is clear that Dalrymple's goal was just collecting texts from the Church Fathers' writings

41 See http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Bible/Text/citations.html (10/24/2010)

42 James A. Brooks, in his work on Gregory of Nyssa's citations, which is the best study available today, sharply criticizes H. F. von Soden's study on the citations of four fathers, one of whom was Gregory of Nyssa. One of the main criticisms was the use of "pre-critical editions." (James A. Brooks, The New Testament Text of Gregory of Nyssa, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991, p.5). This was said about (1) one of the eminent scholars of the discipline (2) who lived in the twentieth century! So, what view should we have about (1) the amateur Dalrymple (2) who lived in the eighteenth century?! Bart Ehrman said about Migne's editions of the Greek Church Fathers' writings that they were "of practically no value for establishing the original wording of the New Testament." (Bart Ehrman, *Didymus the Blind and the Text of the Gospels*, p.6), even though Migne lived a century after Dalrymple.

that showed any kind of similarity with the text of the New Testament. His methodology will not lead us directly to the original or earlier text, because we cannot see, using this method, the wordings of the quoted passages.

Sixth: Dalrymple did not dare publish his research. Those who checked his manuscripts declared that his research was immature and needed more elaboration, and that Dalrymple's decision not to publish it might have been a sign that it was made only for Dalrymple's personal use.[43]

The result: The work carried out by David Dalrymple is amateurish, and can in no way be accepted today as academic research, because it lacks the basic requisite of scholarly methods of research and criticism.

Dean Burgon and His Calculation

In his essays to refute Hort's theory, Dean Burgon collected the Church Fathers' citations and differentiated between what agreed with the "traditional" text (*Textus Receptus*) and what fit the "Neologian" text (Alexandrian). We will list here the names of the Church Fathers who wrote their books before the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) and were alluded to in the UBS's apparatus.

Burgon's List of Pre-Nicene Fathers[44]

Church Father	*Traditional*	*Neologian*
Patres Apostolici and Didache	11	4
Epistle to Diognetus	1	0
Papias	1	0
Hegesippus	2	0
Justin	18	4
Athenagoras	17	20
Irenaeus	63	41
Hippolytus	26	11
Gregory Thaumaturgus	11	3
Methodius	14	8
Alexander Alexandrinus	4	0

43 See David Dalrymple, *An Inquiry into the Secondary Causes Which Mr. Gibbon has Assigned for the Rapid Growth of Christianity*, second edition, Edinburgh: J. Ritchie, 1808, p.xliv

44 John William Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*, ed. Edward Miller, London: George Bell,1896, pp.118-21

Athanasius	179	119
Victorinus of Pettau	4	3
Eustathius	7	2
Theophilus Antiochenus	2	4
Tertullian	74	65
Novatian	6	4
Cyprian	100	96
Heracleon	1	7
Clement of Alexandria	82	72
Dionysius of Alexandria	12	5
Peter of Alexandria	7	8
Arius	2	1
Julius Africanus (Emmaus)	1	1
Origen	460	491

<u>Summation</u>
The quotations made by the Church Fathers were few, except for Origen (third century). Bearing in mind that they often quoted the same passages, the sum of the verses of the New Testament should be reduced even further. Furthermore, there is considerable disagreement in the quotations of the Pre-Nicene Fathers i.e. they cannot be said to be identical.

The Citations of All the Fathers of the Church

Conservative Christians claim that we should reconstruct the New Testament from the citations of all the Fathers of the Church without any chronological limit. I do not think that it is a fair compromise, for many reasons:

First: What is the critical value of quotations that extended over eleven centuries, in different languages, bearing conflicting readings, in reconstructing the text of the original Word of God?

Second: The claim made by Bruce Metzger that it is possible to recreate "a text" of the New Testament through the patristic citations has not been proved. There are other scholars who deny such a hypothesis, such as A. T. Robertson, who stated that "some passages are not referred to at all by any writers,"[45] and Scrivener, who gave a bitter testimony when he said, "Many

45 A. T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p.132

important passages of the New Testament have not been cited at all in any very ancient work now extant."[46]

Third: How can we argue that *one text* was used by the Church Fathers when we know that each Father had his own text, and sometimes texts, which were not identical to any other text used by any other Father?!

Fourth: We are sure that the Alexandrian and Western text-types were widespread in the second century, and this confirms the fact that the Church Fathers had "mixed texts" that cannot be unified in one simple text.

Fifth: Most of the Church Fathers who wrote in Greek after the fifth century used the defective Byzantine text-type.

Conclusion

The Church Fathers' citations cannot guide us to the original text; they are only a collation of conflicting variant readings. We are witnessing, one more time, an utter failure of the Christian apologists' claim.

Metzger versus Metzger

All scholars agree that there are apparent discrepancies between the manuscripts. Bart Ehrman portrays this huge mass of variants in a few words: "There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament."[47] Gordon D. Fee uses numbers to depict the same fact: "No two of the 5340-plus Greek MSS of the NT are exactly alike. In fact the closest relationships between any two MSS in existence—even among the majority—average from six to ten variants per chapter. It is obvious therefore that no MS has escaped corruption."[48] These variants have led scholars to treat each group of texts in the manuscripts as separate text-types. The most widespread and accepted classification is the division of the readings into four distinctive text-types:

1. The Alexandrian text-type. It is also referred to as Neutral (Westcott-Hort), Egyptian, and B. The majority of scholars hold the position that this text-type is the closest to the original. Alexandrian readings tend to be short and somewhat rough and less harmonized than those of the other text-types.

46 Frederick Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament for the Use of Biblical Studies*, third edition, Cambridge: Deighton, 1883, p.416 [italics mine].

47 Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p.90

48 Gordon D. Fee, "Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the Textus Receptus," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21:1, March 1978, p.23

2. The Western text-type. It is also called African and D. It was widely current in Italy and Gaul as well as in North Africa. The chief characteristics of Western readings are long paraphrases and wide additions.

3. The Caesarean text-type. It is also called Palestinian, Alexandrian (Westcott-Hort), and C. It is principally marked by idiosyncratic fusion of Western and Alexandrian readings.

4. The Byzantine text-type, also known as Syrian text, Koine text, Ecclesiastical text, and Antiochian text. It exists in the majority of the manuscripts. It is a text-type characterized by the smoothing out of the harshness of language; it minimizes the apparent contradictions in synoptic Gospels and resolves the difficulties in the passages showing errors or hard sayings.[49]

We are not going to discuss how accurate this classification is; we will take this for granted because it is accepted by the majority of textual critic scholars and most Christian apologists. We will start from this classification to see how compatible the patristic citations are with the best Greek manuscripts.

Metzger, who wrote that it is possible to gather all the verses of the New Testament from the Church Fathers' writings, stated in his very famous book, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament,* under the title "Lists of witnesses according to type of text," that among all the Fathers' citations, only Clement's and part of Origen's citations are witnesses of the Alexandrian text-type.[50] He cites as witnesses for the Western text-type:

- The Gospels: early Latin Fathers
- Acts: early Latin Fathers, and Ephraem
- Epistles: Greek Fathers to the end of the third century, and early Latin Fathers[51]

So, Metzger could not find any Church Father's citations, as a whole, that could be considered to be a witness for the best text-type, except Clement's citations. There is no consensus among scholars about the nature of Clement's citations.[52] A large number of scholars insist that his citations

49 See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp.5*-7*; Gordon Fee, "Textual Criticism of the New Testament," in Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee, eds. *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, pp.7-8

50 See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p.15*

51 See ibid., p.15*

52 See Robert Wilson, "Coptic and the Neutestamentler," in Rodolphe Kasser, Søren Giversen,

represent a Western type. Some such are Vincent Taylor[53], Francis Burkitt in his introduction to Barnard's book *The Biblical Text of Clement of Alexandria in the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles*[54], and A. T. Robertson, who adds that Clement's citations from the New Testament "are not very carefully made."[55] M. Mees noticed the traces of Western text-type in Clement's quotations from the Gospels, and placed his text between "neutral" Alexandrian text and the Western text.[56] Frederic Kenyon observes that Clement's quotations "are plentiful, and it is a noteworthy fact, in view of his place of residence, that in the Gospels they are generally not of the א B family, but broadly agree with the Western type found in D, the Old Syriac, and Old Latin."[57] As a result, we can state that there is no Church Father who can offer us an indisputably pure Alexandrian text.

Even if we accept that all Clement's citations, from the Gospels for example, represent a pure Alexandrian text, we will not find in them even ten percent of literal quotations. The percentage is paltry, as was shown by Cosaert's book *The Text of the Gospels in Clement of Alexandria*, where we found that the quotations were small in size and unhelpful in reconstructing the exact Gospels text used by Clement.

Carl P. Cosaert revealed a stark truth that ended the apologists' dream when he concluded that Clement's citations bring to light the historical fact that Alexandria at the end of the second century did not know a dominant text-type of the Synoptics, and that "in no case was one textual tradition so overwhelmingly influential that it would justify classifying Clement's text as either Alexandrian or Western."[58]

Finally, if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, the original text of the New Testament cannot be

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and Martin Krause, eds., *Coptology, Past, Present, and Future: Studies in Honour of Rodolphe Kasser*, Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1994, p.94; "Text of the Gospels," in James Hastings and others, *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1908, 2/719

53 See Vincent Taylor, *The Text of the New Testament*, A Short Introduction, pp.40-1

54 See Bernard, *The Biblical Text of Clement of Alexandria: in the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1899. Reprinted, Nendeln: Kraus, 1967

55 See A. T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p.137

56 See M. Mees, *Die Zitate aus dem Neuen Testament bei Clemens von Alexandrien*, pp. 52-4, 84-6

57 Frederic Kenyon, *The Text of the Greek Bible, revised and augmented* by A. W. Adams, London: 1975, p.169

58 Carl P. Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels in Clement of Alexandria*, p.310

recovered through the extant patristic citations, because, as acknowledged by Metzger himself, "a majority of modern textual scholars consider patristic evidence, so long as it stands alone, to count for *almost nothing* in ascertaining the original text".[59]

The Perplexed Church Fathers

We can state decisively that the main feature of the early history of the text of the New Testament was the uncritical transmission of its variant readings. The text was growing and changing easily due to the absence of any solid barriers to protect it and because of the lack of a firmly established official canonical version. The Fathers of the Church were concerned about the apparent quality of the message of the text, not its exact Greek words.

There were no sacred texts fixed and sealed in the early centuries. On the contrary; the Fathers were aware that the texts of the sacred books they possessed were *not* final, and that doubts and speculations surrounded many passages about the original readings, upon which they could not give the final word, because different variant readings with close credibility co-existed in the manuscripts of their times. In the face of the complexity of some cases, the Fathers were very tolerant in dealing with the variant readings; there was no place for hardness or stubbornness when the extant manuscripts let them down.

Darrell D. Hannah reveals an unpleasant habit of the great Origen *when* he confronted conflicting variant readings. He noticed that when this Church Father observed that there were different readings for one passage, he, on many occasions, would view these variants as if they were all originals, without opting for one original and dismissing the fabricated one.[60] Other Church Fathers had similar reactions when they faced similar situations. For example, Saint Augustine was content to allow either reading to stand, even if the two variants appeared to be contradictory on the surface, as long as a reading was not untrue or did not alter the orthodox understanding of the context.[61] And Saint Jerome "frequently allowed two readings to stand,

59 Bruce Metzger, "Patristic Evidence and the Textual Criticism of the New Testament," in *NTS* 18 (1972), p.385 [italics mine].

60 See Darrell D. Hannah, *The Text of I Corinthians in the Writings of Origen*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997, p.5; Bruce M. Metzger, "Explicit References in the Works of Origen to Variant Readings in New Testament Manuscripts," in J. N. Birdsall and R. W. Thomson, eds. *Biblical and Patristic Studies: In Memory of Robert Pierce*, New York: Herder, 1963, p.93

61 See Amy Donaldson, *Explicit References to New Testament Variant Readings Among Greek*

sometimes merely mentioning them, other times offering an interpretation for both."[62]

The Confused Church Fathers

The airy nature of the Fathers' citations can be noticed from another angle too; it can be seen in the weird phenomenon of the contradictory witnessing of the same Father. Metzger noticed a very bothersome characteristic in the Church Fathers' citations, which is that "if the father quotes the same passage more than once, it often happens that he does so in *divergent* forms." [63] So their citations are proofs for divergences too, which is a clear sign of the futility of the search for the original text using these incompatible witnesses.

This exasperating fact is clearest in Origen's writings, where many different variant readings co-exist. The Alands noticed this perturbing habit and expressed their irritation openly by saying, "it still remains unexplained why *most of the known alternative readings* are also usually found attested in Origen's writings." [64] In numbers, Origen was mentioned forty-eight times in the first one hundred variants in the UBS^4 apparatus, and he was a witness for more than one variant reading for the same clause more than thirty times.

This phenomenon was noticed in Eusebius's writings too, and that is why Zuntz openly declared about Origen's and Eusebius' citations, "The insuperable difficulties opposing the establishment of the New Testament text of Origen and Eusebius are well known to all who have attempted it […] Leaving aside the common difficulties imposed by the uncertainties of the transmission, the incompleteness of the material, and the frequent freedom of quotation, there is the incontestable fact that these two Fathers are frequently at variance; that each of them quotes the same passage differently in different writings; and that sometimes they do so even within the compass of one and the same work [. . .] Wherever one and the same passage is extant in more than one quotation by Origen or Eusebius, variation between them is *the rule rather than the exception*."[65]

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and Latin Church Fathers, 1/179

62 Ibid., 1/165

63 See Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, p.128 [italics mine].

64 Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p.172 [italics mine].

65 Günther Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles*, London: Oxford University Press, 1953, p. 152 [italics

The Early Corruption Reported by the Church Fathers

The most positive characteristic of the Church Fathers' citations is that some of them predate the earliest manuscripts. Such a feature is supposed to help filling in the gaps caused by the rarity of the manuscripts of the second century, and gives us a better insight into the map of readings of the third century.

Another fact needs to be taken into account, which is that the early Church Fathers reported that the manuscripts of the New Testament were corrupted in their time or earlier. So the Fathers are witnesses that waves of corruption took place, particularly in the second century, which is the century almost unknown to us through the extant manuscripts.

Metzger announced that "Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Eusebius, and many other Church Fathers accused the heretics of corrupting the Scriptures in order to have support for their special views. In the mid-second century, Marcion expunged his copies of the Gospel according to Luke of all references to the Jewish background of Jesus. Tatian's harmony of the Gospels contains several textual alterations that lent support to ascetic or encratitic views."[66]

Gaius, one of the very early orthodox authors (second century), pointed out four well-known families of "corrupted" manuscripts of the holy books. He mentioned that four heretics, Theodotus, Asclepiades, Hermophilus, and Apollonides, altered the New Testament, and that copies of their manuscripts were widespread in the second century.[67]

The Church Fathers enlightened us about an era where struggles ensued about the original text between different Christian sects who believed in the sanctity of the New Testament books. Each of them believed in an "original text" with different wordings within, sometimes, a few decades of the writing of the original.

The Oldest Manuscripts Discount the Worth of the Church Fathers' Citations

The Christian apologists firmly emphasize that the patristic citations complement the Greek manuscripts in the attempt to restore the original text

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mine].

66 Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, pp. 265-66

67 See "Fragments of Caius," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1903, 5/602

of the New Testament, but a close study of the matter shows clearly that these two types of witnesses are irreconcilable. When we try to use the Greek manuscripts in New Testament textual criticism, we should be aware of the misleading aspects of the "numbers," and we need to be concerned mainly about the earliest dates.

We know today that the papyri are the earliest manuscripts, but surprisingly, we find, as Ehrman stated, "in the present century, nothing has contributed more to *the depreciation of the patristic evidence than the discovery of the early papyri*."[68] The text as revealed by the papyri differs notably from what was quoted by the Church Fathers, and that makes it unfeasible to join together the earliest manuscripts with the patristic citations, because doing so is like adding, in a trial, the proofs of accusation to the proofs of innocence to make the case for one of the litigants. Using these two witnesses as a guide to the original text will result in choosing competing, even conflicting, readings for the same text.

68 Bart Ehrman, "The Use and Significance of Patristic Evidence for NT Textual Criticism," p.118 [italics mine].

Can the Witnesses Sustain Each Other?

Hope is nature's veil for hiding truth's nakedness.
— Alfred Nobel

Some apologetic authors who were forced to acknowledge the deficient character of the three witnesses used to build the original/best attainable text got out of this uncomfortable situation by claiming that they agreed with their opponents that none of these witnesses can lead us to the original text. However, they also claim that by using them in a complementary way, they will succeed in reconstructing the desired text where others failed. This proposition agrees with all that has already been said about the deficiencies of these three witnesses, even if we assume that they have been helpful in attaining the lost primitive text.

I think that what has been said in the previous pages is enough to exterminate any hope of reaching that lost text. Nevertheless, I would like to go further, and present another condemnation of the apologetics' assertion that the deficiency of the textual witnesses will disappear if these witnesses are taken as a group. Here are ten objections.

(1) All of the three witnesses share the same defects of manuscriptural transmissions: They came from obscure sources, they are not backed up by chains of narrators, and they suffer from scribal alteration.

(2) The crucial defect of these three witnesses is that none of them covers the *obscure zone*, thus giving a weak witnessing for the state of the text in the second century.

(3) Why are we supposed to eliminate a scenario which tells that some scribes of the first century changed the earliest texts, with the result that all the scribes of the next centuries had access to a only a corrupted text? There is always the possibility of a new discovery of the gospel of John missing its Gnostic prologue. If we cannot prove that this is an impossible find, we cannot be certain that we do have the original text.

(4) We know that some "non-orthodox" Christians from the second century had different versions of some of the books of the New Testament. And there is no definitive proof that the orthodox version of the books of the

New Testament is more faithful to the autograph than the "heretical" versions. The opposite view has already been proven.

(5) The fact that the defective Western text-type was spread widely in the second century (Africa and Europe) and was preferred by the earliest Fathers tells us that the motivations for corrupting the text did not emerge suddenly at some later time; rather, they co-existed with the text from its beginning.

(6) There is no doubt that having the Fathers' citations and the versions as complementary tools in the textual studies will help in eliminating the later fabricated variants, because using such tools will help us to have better historical and geographical insight into the history of the text of the New Testament. The problem that will persist is the question of how to reach the original reading, because having these witnesses will help only in uncovering the late date of some variants and the reason for their arising.

(7) To think that the three witnesses can work in total harmony is a naive perception of the whole matter. As mentioned previously by Ehrman, the earliest manuscripts (papyri) are in conflict with earliest Fathers' citations.

(8) The main trouble faced by scholars in their quest for the best attainable text is the contesting text-types with their divergent variant readings. Our three witnesses support these competitive text-types.

(9) Practically, no reading was chosen only with the help of the versions and the patristic citations. Or in other words: what can the Fathers' citations and the versions add to the witnessing of the Greek manuscripts? The only special service we had from them is that they informed us that few variants known in a very few manuscripts were prevalent or at least in circulation; otherwise they sustained only the variants known in the manuscripts. So, they did not bring really something new to what is known through the manuscripts.

(10) Using the three witnesses together to recover the original/best attainable text is a method already used by scholars who proclaim that we are still far from the autograph, and that we are still having trouble in choosing the "right" version from a plethora of variants.

We cannot guess about the word of God.

An Ambitious goal and an Early Fail

We must acknowledge that the singular care and providence of God have been at work in the preservation of the Scripture in a state of substantial and essential purity.

John H. Skilton, *The New Testament Student and His Field*, 5:8

Reaching the original text is not an option for believers who are devotedly attached to the very word of God; it is a religious duty, since it emerges from the belief that the way of salvation is drawn on the Holy Book's pages. The Word of God is the infallible guide to the desired peace and success in this life and in the hereafter. A seemingly trivial change of words can be the cause of a new interpretation of an article of faith or of a divine commandment.

We have to suppose that all of the notables of the early Church, the Church Fathers in particular, were using the New Testament as (one of) the ultimate sources for the faith and the Christian way of life. And if we suppose that they held that impression, we will be led automatically to believe that each one of them believed that the copy he had contained the word of God as given by divine inspiration to the authors of the New Testament. We can suppose too that these Fathers did their best to get to the words of authors, and that they would not dare quote from the Holy New Testament in their theological treatises, sermons, homilies, or any other religious writing without being sure that they were dealing with the exact word of God.

The Church Fathers, with their high religious and social rank, should be the impeccable preservers of the very word of God. They were the main channel through which the holy texts were spread and by which the divine message was brought close to lay people. No other segment of Christian society was expected to protect the holy text and keep it away from tampering hands in the way the Church Fathers were. One would think that defending the "orthodox" Word should be as serious and holy as the defending of the orthodox faith. But when we look at the Church Fathers' writings; we will be very much surprised to see that even the holy Fathers

were far from being what we supposed them to be. We have two main reasons for believing that they failed resoundingly to reach the holy "original text." The first reason is that, many times, the Fathers defended the originality of forged readings (inserted lately in the manuscripts)[1], and the second reason is that they avowed many times, in one way or another, that they could not tell which of the variant readings was the original one.

The Failing Church Fathers

Contrary to what the Church tells its adherents, the task of choosing the true or most plausible reading was, in many cases, hard and perplexing for the early Church Fathers, who were viewed by their contemporaries as competent scholars and pious believers. It is probable that making the choice between the variant readings was seen by the Fathers as a mere adventurous act, in many cases. The matter of the numerous divergences between the manuscripts was known to them, and so they devised a way of getting out of this uncomfortable situation by simply declaring some readings as genuine and the others as forged by the scribes. Those kinds of decisions were a challenge that the Fathers had to face whether they liked it or not, especially when they engaged themselves in exegetical works and were obliged to give explanations of the "word of God."

We should not expect from the Fathers anything less than a clear pre-imposed methodology embodying a vital mechanism and mature principles to distinguish an authentic reading from a fabricated one. A whole theory to check the fidelity of the transmission of the word of God should be in place as a necessary safeguard so that the word of God will endure without interruption. However, these Church Fathers, who were presumably guided by the Holy Spirit, in accord with the belief of the Mother Church, made weighty blunders by making wrong decisions when they chose weak readings as the original ones. This in itself clearly shows that the Church, dating from the early centuries, lost the original texts of the authors and had only defective copies.

1 Daniel B. Wallace insisted that if a scholar labels a variant reading as unauthentic, that automatically implies that he knows which one is the authentic reading. He, then, should not claim that the original text disappeared. Wallace's objection here is not well founded, because many variant readings existing in our manuscripts were later found to be fabrications, inserted in the manuscripts by latter scribes for theological purposes, harmonization of conflicting accounts, etc. Even when we admit the impossibility of reaching the original text, we may still discuss the existence of the forged variants which were written after the earliest known variants, yet we are still unable to ascribe any of these early variant readings as being the ones written by the pen of the author.

The newest critical studies enrich our library with helpful studies of the Church Fathers' citations from the whole New Testament or from parts of it, using rigid criteria and rigorous methodology. The best of these studies are PhD dissertations made under the supervision of the leaders of the discipline and then edited and included in the series *The New Testament in the Greek Fathers,* which includes the citations of the most important Greek Fathers.[2] This series adopts the newest approved critical standards, and offers comprehensive details and useful results in numbers and percentages to make it easy for other scholars to frame their decisions and to build hypotheses.

We will go through these studies to reach the ultimate answer to the provoking question: "What text can we reach now if we possess the same manuscripts used by these Fathers?" We will compare the New Testament text extracted from the Church Fathers' writings with today's best critical text, which is UBS^4 [3], or UBS^3 if the study was made before the publication of the UBS^4 in the 1990s.

Gregory of Nyssa

We will review the review and critique of the study of Gregory of Nyssa's citations from the New Testament[4] made by James A. Brooks to help us understand how distant these citations are from the different text-types and their best witnesses and from the best critical texts and the majority text.

The summation of Brooks' study on Gregory's citations is shown below[5]:

	Matthew	Luke	John	Paul
Proto-Alexandrian	54.1	60.8	58.3	56.4
Later Alexandrian	62.3	66.7	65.2	63.6
All Alexandrian	59.7	64.6	62.3	60.9
Western	47.1	52.8	50.5	41.2
Pre-Caesarean	61.4	67.6	70	
Caesarean Proper	53.7	66.3	69.1	

2 Bart Ehrman stated in the preface of this series: "writings of a significant Church Father" (Darrell D. Hannah, *The Text of I Corinthians In the Writings of Origen*, p.x)

3 The text of NA27 is identical with the UBS4.

4 It is not the entire text of the New Testament, it is just parts of it, and that is the case for all the citations of the Church Fathers that we will mention in this chapter.

5 James A. Brooks, *The New Testament Text of Gregory of Nyssa*, p.263

All Caesarean	57.5	67	69.5	
Byzantine	63.4	66.9	70.7	69.2

We can conclude from the above statistics the following:

First: From a text-types' perspective, the text used by Gregory of Nyssa is a "mosaic"; we have no text-type identical or close to it.

Second: James A. Brooks concluded that "When Gregory is compared with Bible Societies' text, which is for the most part an Alexandrian type of text, and with the majority text, which is the Byzantine type, he has a much larger amount of agreement with the latter in every instance."[6]

Basil of Caesarea

After his study of the quotations of Basil of Caesarea from the Gospel of Matthew, Jean-François Racine concluded that the "Basil's text of Matthew shows closer affinities to the Byzantine text-type than to any other text-types," [7]and that this result proves virtually that the Byzantine text-type existed in the mid-fourth century. [8]

Starting from the detailed study of the peculiarities of Basil's quotations, Racine describes the "quality" of text used by Basil as reflecting "the editorial trends that were already affecting the Byzantine text-type in mid-fourth-century Cappadocia." [9] Here are the proportional relationships of text-types with Basil quotations[10]:

Alexandrian	**68.4%**
Byzantine	78.6%
Caesarean	69.8%
Western	40.5%

Cyril of Jerusalem

Roderic L. Mullen, in his scholastic study of the text of the New Testament used by Cyril of Jerusalem, as we can see through his extant

6 Ibid., p.264

7 Jean-François Racine, *The Text of Matthew in the Writings of Basil of Caesarea*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004, p.346

8 See ibid., pp.269, 349

9 Ibid., p.346

10 See ibid., pp.250-51, 269

books, presented these percentages that show how close Cyril's citations are to the UBS[4]: [11]

	Agreements	Points of variation	% Agreement
Matthew	65	128	50.8
Mark	9	24	37.5
Luke	43	73	58.9
John	76	117	64.9
Acts	50	73	68.4
Romans	15	21	71.4
1Corinthians	41	62	66.1
Ephesus	20	24	83.3
1Thessalonians And Titus	21	29	72.4
Hebrews	8	23	34.7
Paul's Epistles	120	185	64.8
Catholic Epistles	10	15	66.7

After noting these surprising percentages, we can confidently say that it is impossible to recover the New Testament by citations when their agreement with the best critical text ranges from 34% to 83%.

Didymus the Blind

Although Didymus the Blind (1) lived in the fourth century in Alexandria where the best copies were kept, and (2) his citations are considered as the best among the existing Church Fathers' citations after the study made by Ehrman,[12] the detailed result shows that this Alexandrian Father is by no means a witness for the original text.

Didymus' extant citations from the Gospel of Matthew are the largest among his citations from the four Gospels. If we compare them with the UBS[3], we will find that the agreement is 68.1%, while the agreement between the UBS[3] and the Codex Vaticanus is 91.4%.[13] We will understand

11 Roderic L. Mullen, *The New Testament Text of Cyril of Jerusalem*, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997, pp. 308, 322, 329, 334, 342, 353, 356, 364, 369, 373, 377, 382

12 See Bart Ehrman, *Didymus the Blind and the Text of the Gospels*, 1986

13 See ibid., p.199

better how poor this outcome is when we read that the defective "Textus Receptus" agrees with the UBS^3 in 72.3%.[14]

Epiphanius

Carroll D. Osburn provided a striking result in his study of Epiphanius' citations from the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of the New Testament when he displayed the percentages of agreement between Epiphanius' citations with the Codex Alexandrinus:[15]

Acts of the Apostle: 58.8% [16]
Catholic Epistles: 30% [17]
Epistles of Paul: 61.2% [18]

The above percentages lead one to conclude that there has been a disastrous failure in the attempt to restore the original text of the New Testament.

Athanasius of Alexandria

In his recently published book, in the series *The New Testament in the Greek Fathers*, Gerald J. Donker studied the quotations of Athanasius from the Apostolos (the text of the New Testament exclusive of the gospels). The result of his study does not support the view of those who think that the earliest scholars were able to retrieve the purest text, despite the fact that Athanasius lived in Alexandria, and was the most powerful and influential theologian in that region's early religio-political history. He was the "hero" of the council of Nicaea.

Donker concluded his study by stating that the text of the Apostolos as it appears in Athanasius' extant writings "is simply one representative of witnesses that have moved away from an earlier 'purer' form towards the periphery of the Alexandrian tradition while that text was still in a state of flux in the fourth century […]. Indeed, as Brogan notes concerning the Gospel text and, as is confirmed from this analysis of the Apostolos, Athanasius contributes both to the fluidity of the Alexandrian textual

14 Ibid.

15 We choose the Codex Alexandrinus because Carroll D. Osburn did not make a comparison with the UBS critical text.

16 Carroll D. Osburn, *The Text of the Apostolos in Epiphanius of Salamis*, p.191

17 Ibid., p.209

18 Ibid., p.214

tradition when he sometimes introduces unique variants into that tradition and also contributes to the stabilization of that same text through the influence of his writings due to his position as an important ecclesiastical leader in Alexandria."[19]

Earlier, John Jay Brogan, in his PhD dissertation, "The Text of the Gospels in the Writings of Athanasius," proved that Athanasius corrupted some passages in the New Testament in the course of his theological debates with the "heretics," and these corrupted texts found their way into the subsequent copies of the scribes who were influenced by him.[20]

As a result, Athanasius did not lead us to the original text; on the contrary, his quotations are indications of:

1. An early corruption of the text.
2. Athanasius was more concerned about striving for the "orthodoxation" of the text rather than keeping it as it was received.

Clement of Alexandria

Let us end our search with the first Alexandrian Church Father[21], whom B. Metzger considers as the only Father who is a witness for the Alexandrian text-type. Carl P. Cosaert, in the most recent study of Clement's use of the four Gospels, offers these shocking percentages of the agreement of Clement's citations with the UBS^4.[22]

Matthew	62.7%
Mark	53.2%
Luke	53.8%
John	69.4%

The study of Carl P. Cosaert demolished what was claimed by many scholars: that Clement's citations are witnesses for the Alexandrian text-type. Cosaert concluded that "the most significant conclusion that can be

19 Gerald J. Donker, *The Text of the Apostolos in Athanasius of Alexandria*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011, p.315

20 See John Jay Brogan, "*The Text of the Gospels in the Writings of Athanasius*," PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1997

21 See Carl P. Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels in Clement of Alexandria*, p.xi

22 Ibid., pp.226, 237, 241, 246

drawn about the transmission of the Gospels in Alexandria is that Clement's text *was not monolithic*. Instead of testifying to the dominance of one singular text-type in Alexandria at the end of the second century, Clement's citations suggest that *a number of diverse readings were in circulation*, and Clement does not appear to have been beholden to the sole influence of any one of them. "[23]

Conclusion:

1. None of the Church Fathers who left us citations from the New Testament used a text identical to the actual best critical text (UBS[4]). Most of them used manuscripts that preferred a lot of spurious variant readings.
2. The Fathers of the Church who quoted the New Testament in their available books were unable to access pure Alexandrian text-type manuscripts, not because of their ignorance or negligence, but because of existing insurmountable obstacles obtaining in the early centuries. Eusebius, for example, was born in the third century, and witnessed the Diocletian persecution of the Church, which was marked by an extensive burning of Bibles. He became the bishop of Caesarea, and was honored to have been ordered by Emperor Constantine to prepare fifty copies of the Scriptures for use in the principal churches.[24] He was a prolific author and had at his disposal the library at Caesarea which Origen had built. Despite this, however, the text of the New Testament he used, as seen in his citations, is a vague text that cannot comfortably be categorized as part of any of the text-types of textual criticism.[25]

   It was impossible for Eusebius and all of the other early Christian scholars to figure out the original text of the New Testament, and they fail, as well, to offer us even a text identical to our best constructed critical text. So how could we imagine that we could reach that lost autograph, given such poor early documentation fished out of a vast sea of darkness?

23 Ibid., p.305 [italics mine].

24 See Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 4. 36

25 See for example: M. Jack Suggs, "Eusebius' Text of John in the "Writings against Marcellus," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Jun., 1956), p.142; M. Jack Suggs, "The Eusebian Text of Matthew," in *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 1, Fasc. 4 (Oct., 1956), pp.244-45

"But That Does Not Affect the N.T. Reliability and Message!"

The reality is that the amount of variation between the two most extremely different New Testament manuscripts would not fundamentally alter the message of the scriptures!

—James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy*, p.67

At he end of this survey, we will inevitably reach the conclusion that we have actually lost the words of the original authors of the New Testament, perhaps forever. And this means that we have lost confidence in these scriptures to tell us exactly what their authors wrote. We are left in the darkness, in the middle of a wilderness, with unending inquiries and innumerable hypotheses. There is no latitude for guessing what the authors wrote, because we cannot conjecture about the sayings of God, especially when studying a religious history so full of troubles and mysteries, and when the text acquired its authority from outside and changed in word and meaning as the society diversified into many varying religious affiliations.

What the result of our search means is that we are doomed to wait for an irrecoverable *original* to find out what the authors of the sacred books wrote and to know the exact messages and details they wanted to transmit to those for whom they were destined. We must therefore remain in a state of ignorance and doubt, with no hope of reaching our goal. I realize that some readers might be unconvinced by the proofs exhibited here because they are too tied to their inherited beliefs and too afraid of losing their blissful state by accepting the disturbing truth.

To those who reject the idea of the *loss of the original New Testament*, I suggest considering the idea that we did not lose it, and that the best text we have today is the real autograph. Does this affect the reliability of the New Testament? And does this affect its core message? Why do I ask these questions? There are three urgent reasons.

First: The historical fact of the *lost original* has not been extensively debated. There are only a few articles hidden away in academic journals, and

even in the wider field of New Testament studies, this issue is not well known. I do not want readers to be left without answers to this classical debate about our newest critical text and the change it has made in our perception of the New Testament text and its new message.

Second: To show that the best critical text of the New Testament goes back, at the earliest, to the beginning of the third century, and this text badly damaged both the reliability of the New Testament and its connection to the Church creeds. So, if we could recover the lost original composed in the first century, we would probably have more unpleasant surprises, because the motivation for corrupting the scripture was more profound and the new corruptions had more chances to survive and to be proliferated.

Third: *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, which was formulated by more than 200 evangelical leaders in 1978 A. D., reads:

"We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, *applies only to the autographic text of Scripture*, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy.

We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that *any essential element of the Christian faith* is affected by the absence of the Autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of *Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant*" (Article X).[1]

We need to start from *The Chicago Statement* claim to see if there is any chance for conservative Christians to save their faith and avert the dire conclusions we have drawn here. Every conservative Christian needs to re-examine his faith now that it is possible to throw light on earlier phases of the Holy Scripture. Before passing to the doctored text that so adversely affected the New Testament reliability and the status of Church dogma, I would like the reader to consider the following, knowing the propensity of apologists to trick the unsuspecting reader by claiming that the author has contradicted himself in given statements, so that the apologists can shift the readers' attention away from the central points being made:

1- I agree with the large majority of textual criticism scholars that the *eclectic method* is the best available tool to get to the best attainable New Testament text. This does not mean that this method will help us recover the original, because we do not have enough concrete sources, and we are

1 [Italics mine].

missing fundamental knowledge about the beginning of the transmission of the text. This tool can tell us in most instances which variants were prevalent in the third century, and why and how the other variants arose.

2- I choose not to cite the textual controversies based on the rendering of some passages into English, due to the differences in understanding the same reading in the Greek text. I will deal only[2] with divergences that appear in the Greek text and influence the *scripture* and faith of the Church.

3- I believe that the New Testament is basically the word of man, and that the Church's dogma is basically a man-made fabrication, so the following examples *only* emphasize this belief; they do not create it.

Rephrasing the Apologists' Challenge First

The apologists' assertion that the new critical texts did not affect any element of the core of the Christian faith is too vague to be considered when we discuss the effect of the New Testament revolution in the field of textual criticism. The Church's defenders need to be more precise when they impose an intellectual challenge. The challenge should be embodied thus: "Do the newest critical texts of the Greek New Testament have any serious impact on (1) the textual background of the "orthodox" faith, and (2) the doctrine of the inerrancy of scripture?" Remolding the challenge as I did will help the Christian apologists to defend the *text* and its *impact*, and should give their opponents the chance to exhibit their reasons for not having faith in the Church creeds and its holy books.

Limiting the debate so narrowly, as proposed by Christian apologists, does not help in examining the faithfulness of the transmission of the holy text nor the judging of its claim to have a heaven-inspired source. We should not study the New Testament outside the broad religious significance of its text. It is a text that is still claimed to be reliable and infallible. Reviewing its origin may either affirm or discredit these claims.

We might need to redefine once more the essence of the challenge after inquiring about the real connection between the scriptures and Christian dogma. Is Christianity a religion of the word, a Bibliocentric faith, where the integrity of Church tenets really depends on the integrity of the New Testament text, or should we view the matter differently? Does the apologetic assertion that the recovered original (?) text of the New Testament did not hurt the core of the Church's beliefs make sense, or do we need to confess that we were deluded by when we allowed such a claim to be considered?

2 Except Romans 9:5.

The Unscriptural Church Dogma

We have been told that all the evolution in textual criticism methodologies and the discoveries of newer manuscripts could not disprove any Church dogma, and that all the changes known since the publication of the *Textus Receptus* are trivial and do not remotely harm the tenets of the Church. Here is the obvious answer.

First: The reader who is not familiar with the New Testament text might understand from the Church advocates' claim that the New Testament is a theological book that embodies a series of articles of faith, or that it has some chapters for elucidating each theological issue. Therefore, any serious change in the text would deeply affect these doctrinal declarations. As a matter of fact, the New Testament is not that presupposed book(s). The heart of the New Testament is the Gospels, which constitute a mere narration of parts of Jesus' life. Most of its passages have no real attachment to theological matters, strictly speaking. Consequently, if the changes inserted in the newest critical texts do not affect the New Testament message, this does not mean that the Christian faith guarantees its originality and its genuineness.

Second: Most of the Church creeds have no scriptural background; many were fabricated by Church theologians. Let us look at some of these.

- The deity of Jesus: In the New Testament, Jesus never claimed to be "Theos," "God," even though that creed is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. The only verses that talk about a kind of "divinity" of Jesus are the prologue to the fourth Gospel. It is to be noted that this "divinity" was never professed by Jesus, and it is not the same as understood by the Nicene Church. The first verses of John depicted Jesus as the *Logos,* a "divine" entity that emerged from God. Logos is a neo-Platonic concept for the word of God, as used by God to create the world. The early Church Fathers thought that Jesus was that divine being who had a beginning, i.e. that he was a *created* divine being.[3]

3 Justin Martyr, who lived in the first half of the second century, wrote in "*Dialogue with Trypho*," LXII: "But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him; even as the Scripture by Solomon has made clear, that He whom Solomon calls Wisdom, was begotten as a Beginning before all his creatures and as Offspring by God." Tertullian wrote in "*Against Hermogenes*," III: "He has not always been Father and Judge, merely on the ground of his having always been God. For he could not have been the Father previous to

It is more tenable to consider John's prologue to be a later addition to this Gospel, because (1) there is no contextual connection between it and the next verses, (2) it teaches a theology that is incompatible with what was taught by Jesus, his disciples, or the narrators in the four Gospels, (3) the Gospel of John made it clear in various clauses that Jesus was a human being (e.g. 8:40; 17:1-3), and an Israelite prophet (e.g. 3:1-2; 4:19).

- Jesus is a God incarnate, a doctrine never mentioned in an original text.
- Jesus' death for Adam's sin is a doctrine never taught in the Gospels; it is a Pauline fabrication (Romans 5:12-21).
- The Church adopted the Hellenistic word "ὑπόστᾰσις," "hypostasis," which means literally "beneath-standing," to denote the nature of the three "Gods" in one. It is the formula "Three Hypostases in one *Ousia"* (essence). However, we cannot detect this creed in the New Testament text.
- The Holy Ghost deity is totally unknown to the authors.
- There is no plain statement in the New Testament that God is "three in one" or "one in three." It was Tertullian in the late second century who coined the Christian term "*trinitas*," "Trinity."[4] Tertullian was responsible for the development of the typical Trinitarian terminology; he coined other terms related to this dogma, such as "*persona*" and "*substansia*."
- The belief that the authors of the New Testament were divinely inspired when they composed their texts has no text-proof.
- The descent of Jesus into hell, the problem of predestination, the Church's authority, saints, and many other creeds which are a basis of the theological statements made by the Church throughout Christian history cannot be found within the text of the New Testament.
- For the Catholic and orthodox churches who refuse the *Sola scriptura* doctrine (by scripture alone, meaning that the Bible is the ultimate authority in matters of faith and the Christian way of life), most of the official creeds have no real roots in the Bible.

The Church creeds taught by the Gospels are really sparse; the virgin birth, Jesus' messiahship, Jesus crucifixion and his resurrection contain a lot

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the Son, nor a Judge previous to sin. There was, however, a time when neither sin existed with Him, nor the Son."

4 See Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, III

of vagueness, confusion, contradictions, and anachronisms. Let us look, for example, at the *Nicene Creed* (as enlarged A.D. 381) which summarizes the orthodox faith of the Christian Church, to see the linkage between the Church faith and the New Testament text. One can see that most of this orthodox declaration of faith does not have any textual attestation in the four Gospels (shown in bold), and that part of the rest of the declaration is a common belief held by most of the known religions (underlined).

1.We believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
And of all things visible and invisible.
2.And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
Begotten of the Father before all worlds;
Light of Light.
Very God of very God,
Begotten, not made,
Being of one substance with the Father;
By whom all things were made;
3. Who, for us men, and for our salvation,
came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of
the Virgin Mary,
And was made man
4. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
And suffered and was buried;
5. And the third day he rose again,
According to the Scriptures;
6. And ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
7. And he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead;
Whose kingdom shall have no end.
8. And in the Holy Ghost,
The Lord, and Giver of life;
Who proceedeth from the Father;
Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;

Who spake by the Prophets.

9. And in one holy catholic and apostolic Church;

10. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;

11. And we look for the resurrection of the dead;

12. And the life of the world to come.[5]

And if we look at the proof-texts in the Christian theological treatises, we will notice that Jesus' sayings are barely mentioned, and that the *biblical* Church dogma is Pauline *par excellence*. So Jesus' theological statements are not there in any case.

We have been asked to believe that the changes made in the King James Version did not alter any of the Church's doctrine, while we know that when the Revised Version was published at the end of the nineteenth century, many "orthodox" scholars felt that the new "updates" in the text so badly damaged the Christian faith that they decided to launch an offensive campaign against the team of scholars responsible for it, accusing them, or their preferred manuscripts, of straying from the faith.[6]

Alexander Gordon, one year after the publication of the Revised Version that ignited a lot of debates, portrayed the *status quo*, and presupposed its consequences: "what shall presently be illustrated in detail, that these passages are in fact, *by common consent, the very strongest that have ever been brought forward to support the doctrines which they seem to countenance.* Boldly attacked by one small section of Christians, they have been *vehemently defended on the other hand by bigotry with its thousand tongues*. Each party has felt that victory or defeat on these points meant a controversy gained or a controversy lost. When, therefore, the sponge is, in these instances, deliberately passed over the traces which assimilated the teachings of the New Testament to the doctrines of the later creeds, it is plain that not only is the body of evidence substantially diminished, but its quality suffers, its character is impaired. Fabrications, spurious readings, and wrong renderings, in the most material proof-texts, cannot be detected, exposed, and reduced to the level of

5 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, New York & London: Harper, 1919, 1/27-28

6 This wave was led by Dean Burgon (John William Burgon). Even today some authors accuse the two main figures in the translation committee responsible for the Revised Version (Westcott and Hort) of being heretics; D.A. Waite, a Baptist scholar and one of the most famous defendants of the King James Version today, writes: "these two men were apostates, liberal and unbelievers" (*Defending the King James Bible*, Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today Press, 1996, p.41).

the Apocrypha, without a strong suspicion being generated in reference to a cause which has so long rested upon rotten reeds, and, sometimes unwittingly, sometimes unblushingly, proclaimed them to be sound."[7]

One more crucial point needs to be mentioned, which is that even those who claim that the message of the New Testament was not affected by the recent changes in our best Greek texts avow that this assertion does not mean that we have the exact first text. Daniel B. Wallace gave the gist of the Church defenders' view by stating, "Our fundamental argument is that although the original New Testament text has not been recovered in all its particulars, it has been recovered in all its essentials."[8] He is saying that there is no fundamental change, and that this "fact" does not nullify another "fact," which is that we are not totally sure of the recovering of the original reading of some clauses.

To make his case more comprehensible, he used numbers: "Although the textual variants among the New Testament manuscripts number in the hundreds of thousands, the number of those that change the meaning pale in comparison. Less than 1 percent of the differences are both meaningful and viable. Now, to be sure, *hundreds of texts are still in dispute. We don't want to give the impression that textual criticism is merely a mopping-up job nowadays, that all but a handful of problems have been resolved. That is not the case.*"[9]

The previous "Neo-Orthodox" view admits that we have not yet recovered the whole "God-Breathed Word," and that altering HUNDREDS of passages without leaving clear fingerprints is possible. So, let us suppose that we doubt the authenticity of only a few dozen words (not even "texts"); does that keep us from insisting that the message of the New Testament, as understood by the "Orthodox Church," with its 138.162 Greek words, is in danger?

The theoretical answer is "Yes!" because a large number of the Church doctrines are apparently based on a few words found in the New Testament. We will have a clearer view of the matter under discussion if we take an intrinsic doctrine, such as the divinity of Jesus, which article of faith was denied by so many "Christians" who were labeled as heretics over the past centuries, especially during the early ones, because they refused or doubted its historicity.

7 Alexander Gordon, *Christian Doctrine in the Light of New Testament Revision*, London: Christian Life, 1882, pp.6-7 [italics mine].

8 Daniel B. Wallace, "The original New Testament has been corrupted by copyists so badly that it can't be recovered," in Darrell L. Bock and Daniel B. Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007, p.72

9 Ibid., p.58 [italics mine].

Was Jesus called God (with a capital G) in the New Testament? After studying what was written by twenty-seven distinguished New Testament scholars who lived in the twentieth century, Murray J. Harris revealed that the majority of them "hold that *theos* [God] is applied to Jesus no fewer than five times and no more than nine times in the NT."[10] Father Raymond E. Brown, the most prominent American Roman Catholic scholar in the last century, even though he believed that only in "three clear instances" Jesus was called God in the New Testament,[11] admitted that "no one of the instances we have discussed attempts to define Jesus essentially."[12] So, it is claimed here that there are only a few words that proclaimed Jesus Deity in contexts that are not fundamentally related to the doctrine of clarifying the essence of Jesus. The legitimate question now is this: Don't we have the right to doubt the doctrine of Jesus' deity, since it is based, for those who believe in it, on only a few scattered words in the New Testament, in dubious contexts?!

Wallace acknowledges that Ehrman's "basic thesis that orthodox scribes have altered the New Testament text for their own purposes is one that is certainly true."[13] And he proceeds to say, "We can see evidence of this in *hundreds of places*."[14] So, speaking in the abstract, if it was possible for the scribes to change the holy text for theological reasons (with a broad meaning of "theological") in hundreds of places[15], why should we exclude the

10 Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992, p.274

11 See Raymond E. Brown, *Jesus, God and Man*, New York: MacMillan Publishing, cop. 1967, pp.28-9

12 Raymond E. Brown, "Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?," in *Theological Studies*, 26 (1965), p.572

13 Daniel B. Wallace, "The Original New Testament Has Been Corrupted by Copyists so Badly that It Can't Be Recovered," pp.60-61

14 Ibid., p.61 [italics mine].

15 Dean Burgon sets a good example of how the early "orthodox" altered the text to defend Jesus' deity: "Theodotus and his followers fastened on the first part of St. John 8: 40 ["But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham."], when they pretended to shew from Scripture that CHRIST is mere Man. I am persuaded that the reading "of My Father," [instead of: "of God"]—which Origen, Epiphanius, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Cyril Alex., and Theodoret prove to have been acquainted—was substituted by some of the orthodox in this place, with the pious intention of providing a remedy for the heretical teaching of their opponents. At the present day only six cursive copies are known to retain this trace of a corruption of Scripture which must date from the second century." (*The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, pp. 214-15)

possibility of their altering a few "canonical" passages that established an "orthodox" doctrine not known to the authors of the autographs?

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Because the victors not only write history, but also reproduce and preserve the fundamental texts,[16] we feel the need to air our suspicion about the preservation of these texts by the self-styled "orthodox" Church.

Corruptions Hiding Biblical Errors

The inerrancy of the Bible is a doctrine that greatly affected the fidelity of the scribes when copying the New Testament. The scribes were trying to resolve the apparent inconsistencies in the text by revoking the "difficulties" to fit all the criteria of orthodoxy with its multi-faceted aspects. The most important "difficulty" they wanted to tackle was the errors that threw doubts on the infallibility of the scriptures. An inerrant holy text, as viewed by the Church, is one which is inspired by the Holy Ghost. Celsus, the pagan philosopher who lived in the second century, pointed to the corruption of the Bible made by the Christians, stating that their intuition was "to deny difficulties in face of criticism."[17] Textual criticism scholars are aware of this habit, which has led them to apply a prime principle to help resolve the problem of conflicting variant readings, which is *lectio difficilior potior* or "the harder reading is stronger." The more difficult reading would then be preferred, because the scribes tended to soften the troubling passages.[18]

Today, it is difficult for a "serious" reader to take seriously the answer offered by the top apologist Norman L. Geisler to the "hard" question: "Does the Bible have errors in it?" Geisler writes: "The original text of the Bible does not teach any error. The logic of the Bible's errorlessness is straightforward: (1) God cannot err (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18); (2) the Bible is God's Word (John 10:34-35); (3) therefore, the Bible cannot contain error. Since the Scriptures are breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and God cannot breathe out falsehood, it follows that the Bible cannot contain any

16 See Bart Ehrman, "The Text as Window: New Testament Manuscripts and the Social History of Early Christianity," in Bart Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, eds. *The New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, p. 365

17 Origen, *Against Celsus* 2.27

18 See Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, third edition, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p.190

falsehood."[19] This is not an answer which is acceptable to a skeptic; rather, it is an appeal to not ask, and to believe blindly in the testimony made by the Bible when weighing the Bible's authenticity itself. It is the same as seeing the Bible as simultaneously a suspect and a judge.

The scribes share Geisler's view, but they handled the question in a different way; instead of asking the reader not to ask, they fixed the problem in the text so the reader would have no reason to set up any inquiry. It was their way of effectively solving the controversial textual problems. The earliest manuscripts revealed that the later scribes altered the holy text to hide the errors that unearthed the human source of these texts. We will go through some well-known passages, i.e., known to certain scholars, that expose the original errors in the text, so that everything will be crystal clear to anyone who may have been tricked by the apologists' claims.

We do not seek to challenge Daniel B. Wallace through the following examples, because Wallace does not think that it matters whether or not we believe that the New Testament is free of errors, since he believes that the New Testament is still the holy word and, as such, is worthy of our belief in it. We urge him to think seriously and to commit himself either to the doctrine of inerrancy or of the integrity of the New Testament scriptures, because he is the one who said, "if one wants to argue from the starting point of inerrancy and then judge all manuscripts on that basis, then he must resort to conjectural emendation (that is, changing the text without any manuscript support)".[20]

The Unknown Asaph!

Matthew 1:7-8. "And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat **Asa**; And **Asa** begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias."

The UBS[4] chooses the earliest reading "Ἀσάφ," "Asaph," and rejected "Ἀσά," "Asa," which is inserted by the later scribes who knew that there is no "Asaph" in Jesus' genealogy. 1Chronicles 3:10, the source of Matthew's genealogy, says, "And Solomon's son was Rehoboam, Abia his son, Asa (אסא)

19 Ravi Zacharias and Norman L. Geisler, eds. *Who Made God?: And Answers to Over 100 Other Tough Questions of Faith*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003, p.120

20 Daniel B. Wallace, Errors in the Greek Text Behind Modern Translations? The Cases of Matthew 1:7, 10 and Luke 23:45

http://bible.org/article/errors-greek-text-behind-modern-translations-cases-matthew-17-10-and-luke-2345 (12/4/2011)

his son, Jehoshaphat his son." Metzger stated, "since, however, the evangelist may have derived material for the genealogy, not from the Old Testament directly, but from subsequent genealogical lists, in which the erroneous spelling occurred, the Committee saw no reason to adopt what appears to be a scribal emendation."[21] W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison tried to explain the cause of the mistaken name mentioned in the best manuscripts by writing, "Matthew's Ἀσάφ [*Asaph*] differs from the Ἀσά [*Asa*] of 1Chronicles. Josephus has Ἄσανος [*Asanos*]. Matthew or his tradition probably confused the eponymous ancestor or founder of a guild of Levitic temple musicians (the 'sons of Asaph') to whom several Psalms were ascribed (50, 73-83: cf. 2 Chr 29:30, 35:15; Neh 12:46) with *Āsā*, the good king of Judah (1kgs 15:9-24; Josephus, *Ant*. 8:286–315)."[22]

"Amos" not "Amon"!

Matthew 1:10. "And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat **Amon**; and **Amon** begat Josias."

The earliest and the best witnesses read, "Ἀμώς," "Amos," in Matthew 1:10. Some scribes changed it to "Ἀμών," "Amon," because they knew that the name in the Hebrew Old Testament (1Chronicles 3:14) is "אָמוֹן," "Āmōn," (king of Judah) and in most of the manuscripts of the Septuagint, "Ἀμών," "Amōn."

Robert Gundry said in his commentary on Matthew, "Matthew may have chosen or coined the spelling 'Amos' for a secondary allusion to the prophet Amos, just as he spelled Asa's name like that of Asaph to introduce a prophetic note."[23] Because of this declaration, Gundry was asked to submit his resignation from the Evangelical Theological Society in 1983 for holding views inconsistent with the society's inerrantist doctrinal basis, "unless he acknowledges that he has erred in his detraction from the historical trustworthiness of the Gospel of Matthew in his recent commentary."[24]

We should be open to any serious explanation as to why Matthew used the name "Amos," but we should not doubt that Matthew made a mistake by

21 Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p.1

22 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004, 1/175

23 Robert Horton Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982, p.16

24 James Borland, "The Preservation of the New Testament Text: A Common Sense Approach," in *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10/1 (Spring 1999), p. 49

using the wrong name for the person mentioned in the Old Testament. The reading adopted by the UBS[4] revealed the scribal change, its reason, and the fact that the author of the first Gospel was using a defective manuscript of the Septuagint or that he had simply relied on his imperfect memory.

The "lamentation" of the Old Testament

Matthew 2:18. "In Rama was there a voice heard, **lamentation, and** weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."

Philip W. Comfort commented on the variant readings in Matthew 2:18, where Matthew corrupted the Greek Old Testament passage he quoted by saying, "Because Matthew's rendition of Jer 31:15 (38:15 in the LXX) differs significantly from the Septuagint, various scribes wanted to conform Matthew's rendition to the Septuagint. One way to do this was to add **"**θρηνὸς καὶ**"** ("weeping and[25]"). Such alterations were common in the fourth century (and thereafter*), when scribes tended to produce a standardized text by harmonizing OT quotations in the NT with the Greek OT*."[26]

It is "Gadarenes," but it Should not be "Gadarenes"!

Matthew 8:28. "And when he was come to the other side into the country of the **Gergesenes**, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way."

The best witnesses read: "Γαδαρηνῶν," "Gadarenes," not "Γεργεσηνῶν," "Gergesenes," and that is the variant reading chosen by UBS[4]. Origen informs us that accepting the variant reading "Gadarenes" as the original in the story of the swine as it is in the Gospels means that we should accept an error in Matthew's text, because "Gadara is a city of the Jews, near which are famous hot springs, but it has no lake with adjacent cliffs or a sea."[27] Titus of Bostra shared Origen's view.[28]

The Mouth that Should be Shut up

Matthew 15:8. "This people **draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and** honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."

25 "lamentation, and" in the King James Version.

26 Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary*, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008, p.5 [italics mine].

27 Origen, *Comm. Jo*. 6.41

28 See Titus of Bostra, *Fr. Luc*. 8:26

The earliest manuscripts have this verse saying, “This people honors me with the [their] lips; but their heart is far from me.” This version differs verbally from the Old Testament text which Matthew intended to quote.

Philip W. Comfort comments, “The expanded text is the result of scribal conformity of the OT quotation to Isa 29:13 (LXX). This kind of conformity was especially prevalent in the fourth century and thereafter because it was then that New Testaments were often bound together with Old Testaments in one Bible codex, thereby increasing the temptation for scribes to create harmony between OT quotes appearing in the NT and the OT text itself.”[29]

Unnamed Prophets?

Mark 1:2-3. “As it is written **in the prophets**, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

Because of the mistaken attribution of the prophecy which is composed of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, the later scribes changed “ἐν τῷ Ἠσαΐᾳ τῷ προφήτῃ,” “in Isaiah the prophet,” to “ἐν τοῖς προφήταις,” “in the prophets.” The UBS[4] opts, as it is supposed, for the earliest reading. Eusebius stated that the manuscripts which have “in Isaiah the prophet” are mistaking the attribution of the prophecy.[30] That was also the opinion of the philosopher Porphyry (A.D. 232 A.D.–303 A.D.). Porphyry used this text to prove the ignorance of Matthew. He pointed out in his book *Adversus Christianos* the unskillful evangelists who were so ignorant of the divine scriptures that they attributed texts to the wrong books. Saint Jerome reports, “Porphyry takes up that passage in the Gospel of Mark: “the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ … directing straight his foot path.” Since one testimony comes from the context of Malachi and another from Isaiah, he asks “how can we believe that this passage is taken from Isaiah to which men of the church have often times responded?”[31]

We Need “Sidon”!

Mark 7:31. “And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre **and Sidon**, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.”

29 Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary*, p.44

30 See Eusebius, *Supp. qu. Marin*., 2

31 Jerome, *Com. In Matt. 37.45.* (Tr. Robert M. Berchman, Porphyry Against the Christians, Leiden: Brill, 2005, p.63)

This is one of many geographical inaccuracies in the Gospels that forced scribes to correct the "word of God" to make it fit the reality. In Mark 7:31 "Several witnesses read καί Σιδῶνος ἦλθεν to smooth the apparent awkwardness of the itinerary."[32] Robert A. Guelich adds, "This verse in the eyes of many describes what is at best an improbable if not nonsensical route. Abandoning any attempt at making sense of it, several like Cranfield have concluded that "this verse reflects a certain vagueness on Mark's part about the geography of northern Palestine." Taken literally and in sequence, the route is comparable to going from New York City to the Chesapeake Bay through Boston. The matter becomes the more difficult if the statement simply seeks to move Jesus from "New York" to "the Bay." And add to this itinerary the further problem of the apparent dislocation of the Chesapeake Bay to the middle of Maryland, and you have the basis for the despair."[33]

Why did they Bury him for One More Day?

Mark 9:31. "For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise **the third day**."

Because of the erroneous statement made by the earliest manuscripts that Jesus shall rise "μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας" [*meta treis hēmeras*], "after three days," the late manuscripts went for a different reading, known today in the King James Version, that makes Jesus rise one day before, "the third day."[34] The same corruption of the sentence occurred in Mark 10: 34.

Bye Bye "by"!

Mark 10:1. "And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea **by** the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again."

The best manuscripts do not have "διὰ" [*dia*], "by"; its text reads, "the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan." This text is geographically inadequate because it implies that the region of Judea extended eastward beyond the Jordan, while the truth is that the region to the east of Judea beyond the Jordan was Perea.[35] Scribes could not resist the temptation to correct this mistake.

32 Robert A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 1-8:26*, Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002, p.390

33 Ibid.

34 Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary*, p.131

35 See ibid., p.134

The Disciples Were There Too

Mark 11:19. "And when even was come, **he** went out of the city."

The New English Translation has, "When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city." In the footnote, we read, "Greek "they"; the referents (Jesus and his disciples) have been specified in the translation for clarity. Without such clarification, there is room for considerable confusion here, since there are two prior sets of plural referents in the context, "the chief priests and experts in the law" and "the whole crowd" (both in v.18)." What amazed me here is that Daniel B. Wallace and his team from Dallas Theological Seminary did not allude in the footnote of this translation to the *Textus Receptus* choice adopted by the King James Version, which is the "he" supported by the majority of the manuscripts. We know that this translation is distinguished by its extensive notes (60,932 translators' notes), and its preface stated (under the section entitled "What is unique and distinctive about the NET Bible?") that "the translators and editors used the notes to show major interpretive options and/or textual options for difficult or disputed passages, so that the English reader knows at a glance what the alternatives are."

Why did the majority of the manuscripts change the text from "ἐξεπορεύοντο" [*exeporeuonto*], "they went out," to "ἐξεπορεύετο" [*exeporeueto*], "he went out"? It is because the previous verse (18) was talking about Jesus only: "And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine." The scribal change is due to the awkwardness of the structure of the text, which urged an urgent correction to this "inspired" (!) verse.

The Unbelievable Darkness

Luke 23:45. "And the sun **was darkened**, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst."

The earliest reading, which is adopted by the UBS[4], is "ἐκλιπόντος" [*eklipontos*], "being eclipsed." The later scribes changed it to "ἐσκοτίσθη" [*eskotisthē*], "was darkened."

The conservative James A. Borland points at the problem with accepting the originality of the "eclipse" reading: "a solar eclipse is impossible astronomically during the full moon of the Passover when sun and moon are 180 degrees apart in relation to the earth." This is why A. R. C.

Leaney tersely comments on Luke 23:45: "Strange, since the Greek would naturally mean 'the sun being eclipsed,' impossible at the time of full moon." S. MacLean Gilmour declared, "Probably even Mark's version was intended to imply an eclipse but Luke makes this explanation explicit." Similarly William Manson writes, "Luke or his source rationalize by adding 'owing to an eclipse of the sun.' A solar eclipse was of course impossible at the Passover time—which had to coincide with the full moon—but Luke might not have known this." A. B. Bruce observes of *tou hēliou eklipontos* that "this phrase…ought to mean the sun being eclipsed, an impossibility when the moon is full. If all that was meant was the sun's light totally failing, darkness, e.g. by a sand storm, the natural expression would be *eskotisthē*." H. K. Luce concluded about the supposed eclipse and similar events that "these portents are legendary additions to the story made with the idea that miraculous occurrences must have attended such an event as the death of the Son of God."[36]

Origen was aware of this textual difficulty. He tried to defend the inerrancy of the scriptures by attacking the "enemies of the Church"(!) in writing: "Yet I rather believe that the secret enemies of the church of Christ have altered this phrase, making the darkness occur by reason of "The sun being eclipsed," so that the Gospels might be attacked with some show of reason, through the devices of those who wished to attack them."[37] Saint Jerome shares Origen's opinion about the source of this reading by declaring that it is made up by the enemies of the Gospels: "Qui scripserunt contra Evangelia, suspicantur deliquium solis."[38]

Wayne C. Kannaday pointed out the influence of Origen's attitude on the scribes,[39] and this shows clearly that the canonization of the text through the years was done in apologetic interests. Some scribes omitted the whole niggling phrase from their manuscripts (33 and vg^{ms}) to protect the "believers" from any worrying doubts.

36 James A. Borland, "Re-Examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy," in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25:2 (December 1982), pp.504-05

37 Origen, *Comm. ser. Matt.* 134

38 Jerome, *Comm. Matthew*, xxvii. 45

39 Wayne C. Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition: Evidence of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Text of the Canonical Gospels*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004, p.98

From-to-Jerusalem?

Acts 12:25. "And Barnabas and Saul returned **from** Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark."

Fitzmyer brought attention to the textual problem that forced scribes to change the text that they had received: "After the verb *hypestrepsan*, "returned," the Alexandrian Greek text of Acts (MSS א, B, H, L, P) and the *Koinē* text-tradition have *eis Ierousalēm*, which has been understood at times as the destination of the movements of Barnabas and Saul "returned to Jerusalem." That creates a problem, because 11:30 implies that Barnabas and Saul have gone to Jerusalem, so that they could not now be returning "*to* Jerusalem." Consequently, copyists of various MSS (P^{74}, A, 33, 945, 1739) changed the preposition to *ex*, "from," and those of other MSS (D, E, Ψ, 36, 323, 453, 614) changed it to *apo*, "from." Both of these would make good sense ("returned from Jerusalem"), but they are for that reason suspect."[40]

The Inflated Number

Acts 19:16. "And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame **them**, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."

The earliest reading, adopted by the UBS[4], is "ἀμφοτέρων" [*amphoterōn*], "both," but the later scribes changed it to "αὐτῶν" [*autōn*], "them," because the sons of Sceva were seven, not two as mentioned two verses earlier. [41]

Corruptions Hiding Biblical Contradictions and Discrepancies

Wayne C. Kannaday gives a fresh scholarly summation of the harmonization tendency in the scribes' habits when he writes, "Scholars generally agree that the practices of harmonization, assimilation, and conflation of readings were frequently practiced by ancient copyists of the Gospels. Willem Wisselink identifies four kinds of assimilation that occur in the Gospels: (1) mutually among the Gospels, (2) within a single Gospel, (3) to the Septuagint, and (4) to an otherwise known wording. Scholars have frequently asserted that this tendency was inevitable, in part due to the bent of the human mind for unity and the belief that scripture cannot contradict itself."[42]

40J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York: Doubleday, 1998, p.493

41Ibid., p.650

42 Wayne C. Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition*, pp.86-7

Frederick Wisse, while he does not believe in a corruption that affected the Christian doctrine, noted that some *seventy-five percent* of the bulk of interpolations of the Gospels, which are of great number, are obvious harmonization of non-identical accounts.[43]

Porphyry in the third century hinted at many contradictions in the Gospels. He summed up his view by stating, "The evangelists were fiction writers, not observers or eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus. Each of the four contradicts the other in writing his account of the events of his suffering and crucifixion."[44]

Origen, as one of the strongest earlier apologists, felt the urgency of a human "interference" to save the holy status of the Gospels. He wrote: "If the discrepancy between the Gospels is not solved, we must give up our trust in the Gospels as being true and written by a divine spirit, or as records worthy of credence, for both these characters are held to belong to these works."[45]

The task of ridding the text of irritating discrepancies was carried out by the early scholars in their hermeneutical and apologetic works or their Gospel harmony versions, such as Tatian's Diatessaron, and the ever-vigilant "devoted" scribes in their production of new copies.[46] Scholars played their preferred acrobatic, exegetical games,[47] while scribes went straight to the text to make it look as *non-human* as possible and hence, divine.

The scribes made an intense effort to wipe out the unwelcome discrepancies from the manuscripts of their time. The "faithful" scribes helped

43 Frederik Wisse, "The Nature and Purpose of Redactional Changes in Early Christian Texts: The Canonical Gospels," in William L. Petersen, ed. *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Origins, Recensions, Text, and Transmission*, p.48

44 Macarius Magnes, *Apocriticus*. II. 12-15 (tr. R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Porphyry's Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994, p.32)

45 Origen, Commentary on John, X. 2.

46 Wayne C. Kannaday added: "This concern, though, extended back even earlier. Even in the labors of Matthew and Luke there can be recognized an obvious need for the sacred writings of their faith to bear the marks of consistency, harmony, and factual felicity [...] Another factual error appears in Mark 2:26 where Jesus is said to have recounted David's act of commandeering the bread of presence as occurring during the high priesthood of Abiathar, despite the fact that 1 Sam 21:1-7 clearly states that Ahimelech was high priest when this happened. The scribal tradition shows an awareness of and an apparent concern for this factual error. Craig Evans, assuming Marcan priority, adduces Matthew and Luke as the first Christian interpreters who worked to resolve this problem. In their parallel accounts, Matt 12:4 and Lk 6:4, both evangelists manage the error by simply removing the troublesome phrase altogether." (*Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition*, p.84, 98-99)

47 The "issue of inconsistency was addressed frequently, if variously, by apologetic writers, including Justin Martyr, Tatian, Aristides, Theophilus of Antioch, and Origen." (Ibid., p.84)

other Christians interested in reading the New Testament to have a homogeneous text to some degree, but this is anathema to the scholars of the newest critical texts because they have the task of clearing the Holy Text from forged readings. Today we have a raw text, full of disagreement in its details.

James R. White does not acknowledge the faithfulness of the scribes to the inerrancy of the scriptures. He writes, "Scribes were extremely conservative in their handling of the text and were fearful of "losing" anything in the copy or copies they were working from. Even when a scribe might make a mistake that is obvious, the following scribes would be hesitant to change or "correct" what was found before them in the texts they were copying."[48] He pretends that they were attached, not to their commitment to the holiness of the scriptures, but to preserving what went before them, meaning that the scribes were no more than copiers by rote.

The following examples will show clearly how the scribes from the early centuries changed the holy text to mask the long list of contradictions and discrepancies present in the best manuscripts.

Ministered Unto Them or Him?

Matthew 8:15. "And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto **them**."

After noticing the parallel passages; "ministered unto them" (Mark 1:31 and Luke 4:39), some scribes changed "αὐτῷ" [*autō*], "him," found in the manuscripts of Matthew 8:15 to "αὐτοῖς" [*autois*], "them."

Matthew changed Mark's version because he thought that the woman was supposed to serve only the one who had cured her miraculously, but the later scribes considered Matthew's choice incompatible with the claim that the canonical Gospels are the non-contradictory word of God. They "muzzled" him for the sake of the harmony of the scriptures' accounts.

Were They Allowed to Take Staves?

Matthew 10:10. "Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, **nor yet staves**: for the workman is worthy of his meat."

Jesus commanded his disciples, in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew 10:10, to take "neither a staff," "μηδὲ ῥάβδον," in their journey, but the parallel passage in Mark 6:8 tells us that Jesus commanded his disciples to

48 James R. White, "Examining Muslim Apologetics (Part One): The Bible versus the Qur'ān," in *Christian Research Journal*, volume 25, number 3 (2003)

have "ῥάβδον μόνον," "only a staff." For the sake of harmonization, the later scribes changed the text in Matthew to "μηδὲ ῥάβδους," "neither staves," (plural), so that Jesus forbids only taking more than one staff. The UBS[4] took the side of the earliest manuscripts, making the contradiction in the paralleled passages observable.

Two? By?

Matthew 11:2. "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent **two** of his disciples."

Luke 7:18 tells us that John sent "δύο" [*duo*], "two" of his disciples, while the earliest manuscripts of Matthew 11:2 (א B C* D W) has "διὰ" [*dia*], "by" his disciples. The scribes changed Matthew 11:2 so it will claim that John sent two of his disciples, not all of them. [49]

Children or Deeds?

Matthew 11:19. "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her **children**."

Luke 7:35 reads, "But wisdom is justified of all her children." The best manuscripts of Matthew 11:19 read, "wisdom is justified of her deeds." Many scribes felt uncomfortable with this apparent discrepancy; and that made them feel compelled to eliminate this difficulty by changing "ἔργων" [*ergōn*], "deeds," to "τέκνων" [*teknōn*], "children."

The committee responsible for the UBS[4] "regarded the reading τέκνων [children] (widely supported by B C D K L X Δ Θ Π and most minuscules) as having originated in scribal harmonization with the Lukan parallel (7:35). The readings with πάντων represent further assimilation to the passage in Luke."[50]

The Hungry Crowd

Matthew 12:4. "How **he** entered into the house of God, and did **eat** the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?"

49 Donald A. Hagner gives two reasons for the corruption; the one above and to make Matthew's Greek less awkward (Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, Dallas: Word, 2002, p.299).

50 Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p.24

It was clever of Matthew not to follow Mark's version, which claims that only David ate the bread (2:26), because the account in 1Samuel 21:1-6 tells us that David and his men ate the bread. Many scribes felt that preserving the harmony of the New Testament accounts was more important than respecting Matthew's decision to be faithful to the Old Testament, so they changed "ἔφαγον" [*ephagon*], "[they] ate," found in א and B, to "ἔφαγεν" [*ephagen*], "[he] ate." The UBS^4 defended Matthew's choice of words by opting for the "they ate" reading.

From "Joseph" to "Joses"!

Matthew 13:55. "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and **Joses**, and Simon, and Judas?"

Because the parallel passage in Mark 6:3 has "Joses," many scribes changed the reading available in the best witnesses (B C N O Θ Σ f1 13 33 700^{c} 892 pc l^{184} l^{387} l^{997} it^{a} it^{aur} it^{b} it^{c} it^{f} it^{ff1} it^{ff2} it^{g1} it^{h} it^{l} it^{q*} vg syr^{c} syr^{s} syr$^{h(mg)}$ syr^{pal} cop^{mae} cop$^{bo(mss)}$ eth^{pp} eth^{ms} geo slav^{mss} Origen$^{2/3}$ Eusebius Basil Jerome Augustine) "Joseph" to "Joses" to avoid any differences between the two lists of Jesus' brothers(?).

The Goodness or the Good?

Matthew 19:17. "And he said unto him, **Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God**: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

When many scribes noticed that Jesus' wording in Matthew 19:17 differed from what he said in Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19, they changed the earliest text from "Why do you ask me about the good? One is good," "τί με ἐρωτᾷς περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ; εἷς ἐστιν ὁ ἀγαθός" to "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God." "Τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν; Οὐδεὶς ἀγαθός, εἰ μὴ εἷς, ὁ θεός."

W. C. Allen explains the reason for Matthew's change of the text as he received it from the Gospel of Mark: "Mt.'s changes are probably intentional, to avoid the rejection by Christ of the title "good," and the apparent distinction made between Himself and God."[51] The scribes did not respect Matthew's view because they thought that sacrificing Matthew's choice was acceptable since their intervention was for a "noble" purpose

51 W. C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1907, p.208

which was eliminating the discrepancies from the holy texts.

Her Daughter or his Daughter?

Mark 6:22. "And when **the daughter of the said Herodias** came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee."

The earliest manuscripts of Mark 6:22 (Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus) tell us that the girl who danced and pleased Herod is "Herodias," who is Herod's daughter: "αὐτοῦ Ἡρῳδιάδος" [*autou Herōdiados*], "his [daughter] Herodias," while Matthew 14:6 informs us that the girl who danced was Herodias' daughter. The scribes did change Mark 6:22 to "αὐτῆς τῆς Ἡρῳδιάδος" [*autēs tēs Herōdiados*], "[the daughter] herself of Herodias," to fit the parallel passage in Matthew 14:6.[52]

R. A. Guelich, who preferred the oldest reading, added, "by taking αὐτοῦ [*autou*] as the reading, the daughter is named "Herodias." Yet Josephus tells us that Herodias' daughter from her first marriage was Salome, the wife of Philip the Tetrarch (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.5.4). This would mean that the daughter's name had become confused with the mother's."[53]

Wallace's translation, The New English Translation, chose the troubling reading. We read in the footnote: "Behind "his daughter Herodias" is a most difficult textual problem. The reading adopted in the translation, τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἡρῳδιάδος, is supported by ℵ B D L Δ 565 *pc*; it is also the most difficult reading internally since it describes Herodias as Herod's daughter. Other readings are less awkward, but they do not have adequate external support […].The reading τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἡρῳδιάδος, despite its historical difficulties, is most likely original due to external attestation and the fact that it most likely gave rise to the other readings as scribes sought to correct it."

Galilee or Judea?

Luke 4:44. "And he preached in the synagogues of **Galilee**."

52 Even though most of the newest English translations are based on the text of the UBS4; they did not adopt the UBS4 chosen reading in Mark 6:22 (with few exception such NRSV), and that shows CLEARLY that the New Testament is not–till now–free from the human intention to change its statements!

53 R. A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 1-8:26*, p.332

The scribes felt the need to change the earliest manuscripts which read, "τὰς συναγωγὰς τῆς Ἰουδαίας," "the synagogues of Judea," to "ταῖς συναγωγαῖς τῆς Γαλιλαίας," "the synagogues of Galilee," because the context of verse 44 informs us that Jesus was in Galilee before and stayed there.[54] The UBS^4 followed the earliest manuscripts that have "Judea."

Were They Silent?

Luke 8:45. "And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter **and they that were with him** said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?"

The best witnesses (P^{75} B Π 700* 1079 1546 al syr^c syr^s syr^{pal} cop^{sa} geo Diatessaron Origen^{vid}) omit "and they that were with him." The UBS^4 ignored the added clause because it is a mere scribal addition to make Luke's version in harmony with Mark's version, which has "And his disciples said unto him" (5:31).

A Desert Place in the city?

Luke 9:10. "And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately **into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida**."

The earliest manuscripts of Luke 9:10 (p^{75} (Βηδσαϊδά) B cop^{sa} cop^{bo}) inform us that Jesus and his disciples were going "εἰς πόλιν καλουμένην Βηθσαϊδά," "into a town called Bethsaida," but after the next verse (verse 12), we read that the disciples are "in a desert place." Many scribes who noticed this irritating contradiction changed their manuscripts in Luke 9:10 to "εἰς τόπον ἔρημον πόλεως καλουμένης Βηθσαϊδάν," "into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida." The UBS^4 went for the earliest variant reading, making the Gospel of Luke contradict itself, Matthew 14:13 and Mark 6:31-32. A. Plummer stated, "The common reading, εἰς τόπον ἔρημον πόλεως καλουμένης Βηθσαιδά (A D G H K M S U V etc., Aeth. Arm. Goth.), seems to be an ingenious *conflation of the original text*, εἰς πόλιν καλουμένην Βηθσαιδά (B L X Ξ 33, Boh. Sah.)—which is supported by D [only κώμην for πόλιν]—*with a correction of it*, εἰς τόπον ἔρημον (א*), or εἰς τόπον ἔρημον Βηθσαιδά (b c ff_2 l g Vulg. Syr.), or εἰς τόπον ἔρημον καλούμενον Βηθσαιδα (a e f). These corrections would be suggested by ver. 12 and Mt. and Mk. and the

54 See Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, Tr. G. Buswell. New York: Harper & Row, 1960, pp.38-41

difficulty of associating the miracle with a πόλις [city]."[55]

"Beloved" or "Chosen One"?

Luke 9:35. "And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my **beloved** Son: hear him."

The earliest manuscripts (P^{45} P^{75} א B) have "ἐκλελεγμένος" [*eklelegmenos*], "chosen one." Some later scribes change it to "ἀγαπητός" [*agapētos*], "beloved," to harmonize it with Mark 9:7.

Philip W. Comfort made an interesting comment on the variant readings in this verse: "As *often happened in the textual transmission of the Gospels (especially from the end of the fourth century onward), divine proclamations about Jesus were harmonized.* At Jesus' transfiguration, each of the Synoptic Gospels has different wording. Matthew 17:5 reads, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; Mark 9:7 reads, "This is my beloved Son"; and Luke 9:35 reads, "This is the Son, the chosen one."[56]

Egg and bread

Luke 11:11-12. "If a son shall ask **bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if** he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?"

The earliest copies of Luke have two pairs mentioned in Jesus' analogy: fish/serpent and egg/scorpion, while Matthew's parallel passage has two different pairs: bread/stone and fish/serpent. Later scribes expanded Luke's version to three pairs: fish/serpent, bread/stone, and egg/scorpion, to make it resemble Matthew's account.[57]

Who Was at the Sepulcher?

Luke 24:1. "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, **and certain others with them**."

Comfort comments on the addition of "and certain others with them" by many scribes: "This addition was made to bring the text into harmony with Luke 24:10, which speaks of other women beside Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James."[58]

55 Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1896, p.243

56 Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary*, p.195 [italics mine].

57 See ibid., p.204

58 Ibid., p.243

"Jona" or "John"?

John 1:42. "And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of **Jona**: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

Jesus in John 1:42, as in the *Textus Receptus/King James Version*, is calling Simon "the son of Jona," distorting the earliest manuscripts (P^{66} P^{75} P^{106} א B*) which read "the son of John." It is evident that the scribes changed the text to bring it into harmony with Matthew 16:17, where Jesus called Simon "Barjona"; "bar," "בר" is Aramaic for "son."

Ernst Haenchen commented on the text, "Jesus looks at the one brought to him and says, "You are Simon, the son of John" (Hebrew: יוחנן). In Matt 16:17, however, Jesus addresses him as "Simon, son of Jonah." On this, Jeremias (*TDNT* 3:407) remarks, "Apart from the prophet Jonah there is no instance of Jona(h) as an independent man's name prior to the 3rd century A. D." On the other hand, Jonah occasionally appears in the LXX (the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament) for Hebrew "Jochanan." From that Jeremias would like to conclude that Jonah in Matt 16:17 is an abbreviation of Jochanan. But that conclusion is uncertain because the ordinary shortening of Jochanan is pronounced יוחא or יוהי. It is possible that the less common name Jonah was replaced by the more common "Jochanan" (John). The Fourth Gospel would then be following another tradition here."[59]

The Helpful Disciples?

John 6:11. "And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed **to the disciples, and the disciples** to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would."

The addition present in the manuscripts that are the base of the King James Version was created to make a harmonization to the synoptic accounts of this same event (see Matt 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16).[60] In John's account, it was Jesus who distributed the multiplied loaves and fish, while the synoptic Gospels attributed this act to the disciples of Jesus. The added words were revoked from the UBS^4.

59 E. Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, tr. R. W. Funk, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, 1/164

60 Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary*, p.275

Were the Beasts There?

Acts 10:12. “Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth**, and wild beasts**, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.”

In Acts 11:6, it is said that Peter told the apostles and the brothers throughout Judea that he saw in the dream (revelation) “fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.” The first reference to this same dream appeared in Acts 10:12, but the account misses in the earliest manuscripts (p^{74} ℵ A B): “(καὶ) τὰ θηρία” [(*kai*) *ta thēria*] “(and) wild beasts.” Many scribes added “(and) wild beasts,” so Peter was giving the same account of the revelation made to him in 11:6 and 10:12.

The Seat of Whom?

Romans 14:10. “But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of **Christ**.”

The best manuscripts and versions (ℵ* A B C* D F G (0150 τῷ θεῷ) 630 1506 1739 1852 2200 l^{1178} it^{ar} it^{b} it^{d} it^{e} it^{f} it^{g} it^{o} it^{x} it^{z} vg^{ww} vg^{st} cop^{sa} cop^{bo}) have “the seat of God,” “θεοῦ” [*theou*],” which contradicts the statement of 2Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ “Χριστοῦ” [*christou*].” Some faithful scribes felt that they were responsible for bringing the *word of God* into conformity, so they changed “God” to “Christ.” Unfortunately, the new critical texts lack this *noble* intention.

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I think that there is no acceptable reason to disagree with the statement of the Anglican Bishop Hugh Montefiore that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy seems inherently improbable due to “evident errors and contradictions” found in these scriptures and the late canonization of the books of the Old and New Testaments.[61]

Errors and Contradictions: Do They Matter?

When he was interviewed by Lee Strobel, Wallace narrated a significant story. He said that a Muslim girl came to him with a long list of discrepancies in the Gospels. She told him, “You’re going to have to answer every single one of these before I can believe anything about Christianity.” He told her, “Don't you think this list proves that the writers didn’t conspire

61 Hugh Montefiore, *Credible Christianity: The Gospel in Contemporary Society*, London: Mowbray, 1993, p. 5

and collude when they wrote their Gospels?" She said, "I've never thought of it that way." He said that we should look at only the positive side, which is that the agreement of the evangelists on an absolute core of central beliefs suggests that they got the basics right, even though they did not cook all of this up. *Voilà*! The girl converted to Christianity! [62] I am not going to investigate the credibility of this story, because that is irrelevant to our purposes here. I am, instead, concerned about having a definitive answer to the following question: Are discrepancies and mistakes meaningless facts that cannot affect the New Testament credibility? Many alarming realities come to light from a review of the undesirable discrepancies and errors spread over the New Testament books. Here are some of those disturbing facts.

First: It makes no sense to say that God inspired His word to the authors of the New Testament, and at the same time led them, or even gave them the license, to contradict each other so many times on so many different issues, some of which are fundamental theological issues, and to spread erroneous statements about science, geography, and the Old Testament. These discrepancies and mistakes constitute an unassailable argument that the New Testament is not the word of God, but is the word of men who belonged to the culture of the first century and who were interested in expressing their own personal views in historical and theological matters.

Second: The authors of the New Testament expressed different theological views and narrated conflicting accounts of the story of Jesus and his disciples, which tells that no one of them was considering the other authors as infallible or chosen by God to convey his holy word to human beings. In fact, these authors were regular historians who were trying to transmit the events they heard about, or theologians interested in sending religious messages through the fabricated stories they did create.

Third: The authors of the New Testament books did not believe in the infallibility of each other. They dared to opt for other historical narrations (mainly in the details) or theological tendencies. So now the question is this: Why would this (Muslim) girl believe in the New Testament, which was written by authors who (1) were not eyewitnesses of the events they recorded,[63] (2) were not inspired by God, (3) were inaccurate, (4) had

62 See Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, p. 79

63 With reference to the four gospels, only Matthew and John claimed to be Jesus' disciples, but this

conflicting views about the minor (?) details of Jesus' life and teachings, (5)did not even know, as Wallace avowed, that they were writing scriptures?[64] These authors were not God's inspired men, nor were they trustworthy eyewitnesses, or competent historians. What, then, could compel a non-Christian to follow the Jesus of the New Testament?[65]

Corruptions Hiding an Unpleasant Jesus

The picture of Jesus engraved in the scribes' consciousness as "God," i.e., a sinless being, made some of these scribes rush to eliminate any traces of stories or statements running against that passionate belief. These scribes got themselves involved in polishing the official narrations to make them fit their honorable view of Jesus and to defend Jesus against antagonistic character assassination.[66] From the numerous examples, we will cite the following.

A Defiled God!

Luke 2:22. "And when the days of **her** purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord."

The oldest and the majority of the manuscripts have "their," "αὐτῶν" [*autōn*], which means that the text either alludes to the need for purification

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cannot be accepted any longer, because we now know, as admitted by Wallace, that Mark, who belongs to the second Christian generation, was the main source for Matthew. The large divergences between John and the other synoptic gospels led many scholars to doubt the accuracy of John's accounts and his discipleship.

64 Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, p.74. Wallace portrayed this view with a very paradoxical statement of bibliology: "The real miracle of inspiration is that the writers were usually unaware of the Spirit's guidance of them as they penned their words." (Wallace, *The Synoptic Problem and Inspiration: A Response*; http://bible.org/article/synoptic-problem-and-inspiration-response (12/4/2011).) I have to admit that it is really an "unbelievable miracle"! An absolutely unbelievable one! The New Testament was written, as depicted by the Wallacian bibliology, this way: (1) The authors used human sources when collecting the material of their books. (2) They did not intend to write the Word of God. (3) They did not even know that they were writing the Word of God. Yet, we have to believe that they were writing the Word of God! I can see Wallace asking us to be more biblist than the authors of the Bible, or as the French proverb says: "être plus royaliste que le roi."

65 Wallace goes on to say that the New Testament should be seen as "a book," like any historical book, when he was answering those who think that the doctrine of inerrancy is a core belief in Christianity. He said, "If we demand inerrancy of the Bible before we can believe that any of it is true, what are we to say about other ancient historical documents? We don't demand that they be inerrant, yet no evangelical would be totally skeptical about all of ancient history." (Wallace, *My Take on Inerrancy*)

66 Wayne C. Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition*, p.105

of Mary and Jesus, or of Mary and Joseph. Some later scribes could not abide either of these meanings, because the first one presumed that the holy, pure Son of God was defiled, and the second meaning (with the previous one) contradicted what was mentioned in the Old Testament (Leviticus 12:2-4) where only the female who begat a boy is supposed to wait for a purification. So it is inconsistent with the Jewish customs to talk about the purification of the father (or son) as well as the mother.[67] Some scribes changed the pronoun to "her," "αὐτῆς" [*autēs*], to maintain the idea of Jesus' sanctity, and to make the text conform to Jewish customs. It is striking here that a reading which does not have support from any uncial and perhaps only from one cursive (76) has been widely adopted.[68] Other scribes chose to avoid facing the problem, so they omitted the pronoun altogether (such as the scribe who copied 435, and the Bohairic Coptic version).

Excuse his Anger!

Matthew 5:22. *"B*ut I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother **without a cause** shall be in danger of the judgment.*"*

What is the effect of deleting "without a cause,*" as the earliest manuscripts do? The only reasonable answer to this question is that it negates* the doctrine of the sinlessness of Jesus and, in so doing, makes Jesus worthy of condemnation and judgment, because he himself became angry with many people on various occasions (Mark 3:5, 8:33 …). *This is what motivated the scribes to add* "without a cause.*"*[69] *The UBS⁴ did not care to keep a blameless Jesus, because its goal was to ascertain the best reading, not to hunt for the less flattering one.*

The Nervous Jesus

Mark 1:41. "And Jesus, **moved with compassion**, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean."

"The merciful Jesus" in this text is created by the scribes' ink. The scribes were trying to bury the best reading, which says that Jesus did not "move with compassion" when he healed the miserable man with leprosy, but rather that he was angry, "ὀργισθεὶς," [*orgistheis*] with this woeful sick

67 Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible translation*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.102

68 Alfred Plummer, A *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, p.63

69 Other reasons are (1) it makes no sense to ask people not to be angry even for good reason; (2) Jesus' commandment is not compatible with Paul's commandment: "Be ye angry, and sin not" (Ephesians 4:26)

man.[70] Today, the greater number of scholars prefer "ὀργισθεὶς."[71] Even Daniel B. Wallace commented on an essay written by Bart Ehrman defending the originality of the reading that included Jesus' furiousness[72], saying that Ehrman "has made not just an impressive case but a persuasive one."[73] Yet Wallace could not let it go; he claimed that the "original" reading did not change the New Testament portrait of Jesus.[74] There is irony in what Wallace said when he presented one of the convincing pieces of evidence for the use of the Gospel of Mark by the authors of the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew, which is the avoidance of Mark's hard sayings by these two evangelists. These are Wallace's words: "Mark 3:5/Luke 6:10—'he looked around at them with anger/he looked around on them all.' Matthew omits the verse entirely, though he includes material both before and after it (12:12-13). That Luke would omit a statement regarding Jesus' anger is perfectly understandable."[75] Why is it understandable? Undoubtedly, because the peaceful Son of God who gave his life (!) on the cross to save sinners should not act like an ordinary human being, full of unrestrained emotions such as anxiety and anger.

It was not only the urgent need felt by the scribes who copied the Gospel of Mark to excise any notion of Jesus' anger. Matthew and Luke also were embarrassed by the stories of Jesus' temper, which is why they at no time followed Mark in portraying Jesus as an angry man. (Our case is seen in Mark 3:5=Matthew 12:13, Luke 6:10; Mark 10:14=Matthew 19:14, Luke 18:15). They edited Markan passages to keep the "sinless" Jesus free from human rage.[76]

The Lying king

John 7:8. "Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up **yet** unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come."

70 See Bart Ehrman, "Did Jesus Get Angry or Agonize?," in *Bible Review* 21 (2005). pp.16-26

71 See the list of scholars in Heinrich Greeven and Eberhard W. Güting, *Textkritik des Markusevangeliums*, Münster: LIT Verlag Münster, 2005, pp.120-21

72 "A Leper in the Hands of an Angry Jesus," in *New Testament Greek and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Gerald Hawthorn*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003; pp.77-98

73 Daniel B. Wallace, "The Original New Testament Has Been Corrupted by Copyists So Badly That It Can't Be Recovered," p.66

74 See ibid., pp.66-7

75 Daniel B. Wallace, The Synoptic Problem, http://bible.org/article/synoptic-problem (6/30/2011)

76 See Wayne C. Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition*, pp.131-32

Jesus asked his disciples to go unto the feast, and informed them that he would not go there. Early scribes changed the word "οὐκ" [*ouk*], "not" to "οὔπω" [*oupō*], "not yet" to make Jesus say that he would join the disciples later on. The scribes found out that keeping the original reading meant that the sinless holy Jesus was lying to his disciples, because verse 10 says, "**But** when his brethren were gone up, then **went he also up** unto the feast, **not openly, but as it were in secret**." This verse meant clearly that Jesus intentionally lied, by stating that he did not go to the feast "**openly, but as it were in secret**." Saint Jerome reported Porphyry's unduly harsh view of Jesus of the Gospel: "Jesus said he would not go up, and he did what he had previously denied. Porphyry rants and accuses him of inconstancy and fickleness, not knowing that all scandals must be imputed to the flesh."[77] The UBS^4 did not intend to cover up a "lying Jesus," so it adopted the "harsh reading."

Fear the Lamb of God!

Ephesians 5:21. "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of **God**."

We get used to hearing about the story of love between Jesus and those who believe in him, but we have never heard that the true believer should "fear" Jesus, the crucified Lord. It is not ignorance that deterred us from knowing that "unusual Jesus." It is the scribes who changed the phrase in Ephesians 5:21 from "the fear of Christ [*christou*]" to "the fear of God [*theou*]."

The best witnesses, and the majority, agree that Jesus should be feared, but the Church never mentions this doctrine, because it does not want to reveal to its flock what might seem a "frightening Jesus."

Corruptions Changing Commandments

The scribes usually tended to corrupt some laws of the Holy Scriptures because they thought that these commandments were too rigid or too lax or because they wanted to insert in the pages more "useful" commandments or delete those they thought were senseless. The New Testament's scribes were not an exception; they altered the words of the authors to make them conform to their perception of the truth.

The Disgusting Divorcee

Matthew 19:9. "And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: **and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery**."

77 Jerome, *Dialogus Adversus Pelagianos*, II. 17

The scribes were very enthusiastic when copying the condemnation of the act of divorce, so they added, by their own choice, a new condemnation for someone who marries a divorcee, by labeling him an "adulterer." Mark 10:12 accuses only the female divorcee of being an adulteress if she remarries, and in Matthew 19:9, scribes include the new husband in the adulterers category. Therefore all of them will receive this unpleasant label.

Is It Still Good to Fast!

Mark 9:29. "And he said unto them, this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer **and fasting**."

Even though Jesus has discouraged fasting as inappropriate until the bridegroom is taken away (Mark 2:18–20), many scribes added "καὶ νηστείᾳ" [*kai nēsteia*], "and fasting," to Mark 9:29, reflecting the church's growing interest in fasting.[78]

Let Us Make it Easy for Adulteresses!

John 7:53- 8:11. The story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery is, for many "believers," the most emotional and touching story in the New Testament. It was used extensively in the Christian literature to indicate the code of life for the *true* Christian: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (John 8:7). The story was found to be a fake one by scholars.[79] Many Christians have thus been deprived of their favorite passage in the Holy Scriptures, but most of those attached to the story have no idea that it is flawed, because the Church does not preach *bad news* in its Sunday services.

The "Orthodoxisation" of the Holy Text

The Church believes that Jesus is the Son of God, one of the triad God(s), born of a virgin, sent by God the father to be crucified, and that he rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven. The most updated Greek New Testament text eliminated the explicit proof-texts of many fundamental tenets of the Church: a shocking truth that the Church does not dare reveal to its followers because it would probably incite its flock to doubt the biblicism of these creeds.

78 C. A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 8:27-16:20*, Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002, p.47

79 Daniel B. Wallace made a strong case against the authenticity of the story, see Wallace "Reconsidering 'The Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery Reconsidered," in *New Testament Studies*, 39 (1993), pp.290-96

The "orthodox" scribes felt the urgent need, from the beginning of Christian history, to back up their faith with holy statements, especially when they felt any weakness of the apologist arguments made against the "heretics." They altered the text, in an orthodox interpretation, to make it adhere more closely to what they felt it was supposed to be. Reproducing new copies was not, therefore, an automatic process; rather, it was a re-creation of the text to make it reflect the *status quo* of the Church's creeds.

Kim Haines-Eitzen summarizes the current position of scholars about this matter: "studies have shown that certain changes made by scribes in the process of copying appear to have been motivated by anti-Jewish sentiments; others seem influenced by a certain animosity toward women; others by apologetic concerns; and still others can be explained by theological, especially Christological, concerns. Such studies have seriously countered Hort's famous statement: "even among the numerous unquestionably spurious readings of the New Testament there are no signs of deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes."[80]

We need to go through the detailed examples to see how our newest critical texts show a differentiation between the beliefs of the church and the sacred books.

The Deity of Jesus

The New Testament never mentioned in an *original, clear statement* the deity of Jesus as understood by the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. One cannot find any proclamations ascribed to Jesus such as these: I am God (Theos/Θεός)! I am Jehovah (יהוה)! I am the only God! There is no God besides me! I am the God of Israel! I am the God of Moses! I am God who sent Moses to your ancestors! No clear and straight statement has ever been shown to come from the lips of Jesus to proclaim that he is God. The earliest witnesses who helped us to correct the deformed passages in the New Testament proved that (1) the clear statement proving Jesus' deity is corrupted, and (2) some verses as they appear now in the best critical texts disagree with the claim that Jesus is "God."

Forged Proof-texts

The conservative scholar Jay P. Green stated, "There are *only two verses* which the Arians [followers of Arius. They believe Jesus Christ was

80 Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature*, New York: Oxford University, 2000, p.112

created, not a member of the Triune God] falsely feel undermines their beliefs: 1Timothy 3:16 […]. The other key verse hated by the Arians (today they are represented by Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, the Unitarians, and many other cults) is Romans 9:5."[81]

The translation of Romans 9:5 depends on the punctuation inserted in the text. Because punctuation was missing in the early manuscripts, scholars had different opinions about the meaning of the verse and how it is supposed to be rendered into modern languages. The Revised Standard Version has an opposite view of this verse from the one found in the King James Version:

KJV: "Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

RSV: "to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen."

The *interpreters' Bible* expressed that "the choice is probably to be made between the KJV and the RSV translations. *The majority of modern commentators favor the latter* because of the unlikelihood of Paul's having here referred to Christ as 'God'."[82]

While Romans 9:5 depends on grammatical issues, the modern translation of 1Timothy 3:16 was affected gravely by the new critical New Testament texts.

It is the "Mystery"!

1Timothy 3:16. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God** was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

The oldest witnesses have "ὃς" [*hos*], "who," not "θεὸς" [*theos*], "God," so the text is not talking about the God incarnated, but rather about "the mystery," as can be seen by the context and Paul's common statement about the "mystery" (Romans 16:25, Ephesians 1:9-10, Colossians 1:27…). The Peshitta clearly confirms this fact: "ܘܫܪܝܪܐܝܬ ܪܒ ܗܘ ܐܪܙܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܟܐܢܘܬܐ ܕܐܬܓܠܝ ܒܒܣܪ" "and truly great is this mystery of righteousness which was revealed in the flesh." The later scribes changed [*hos*] to [*theos*],

81 Jay P. Green, *Unholy Hands on the Bible: An Examination of Six Major New Versions*, Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1992, pp.225-26 [italics mine].

82 George Arthur Buttrick and others, eds. *The Interpreters' Bible*, New York: Abingdon Press, 1954, 9/540 [italics mine].

using the ancient abbreviation for the sacred name of God, as if the Greek letter “O” had lost a crossbar in transmission.[83] The UBS[4] took the text to its earliest known form, eliminating a crucial proof for Jesus’ divinity.

Unwanted Texts

The Ignorant God!

Matthew 24:36. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”

The earliest manuscripts have “οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός” [*oude ho huios*], “nor the Son” after “not the angels of heaven,” declaring that the Son is not all knowing, which means that Jesus the “Son of God” is not “God”.

Saint Ambrose knew that accepting the originality of “nor the son” would nullify Jesus’ divinity, so he claimed that it did not exist in the oldest Greek manuscript. And he added, “it is not to be wondered at if they who have interpolated the sacred Scriptures have also falsified this passage. The reason for which it seems to have been inserted is perfectly plain, so long as it is applied to unfold such blasphemy.”[84] So, accepting the addition of “nor the son,” as the UBS[4] did, is a provocative blasphemy that cannot be reconciled, for any reason, with the orthodox faith.

Daniel B. Wallace did his best to lessen the gravity of this problem when he answered Ehrman’s *Misquoting*. He said, “What is not disputed is the wording in the parallel in Mark 13:32—‘But as for that day or hour no one knows it—neither the angels in heaven, *nor the Son*—except the Father’” (italics added). Thus, there can be no doubt that Jesus spoke of his own prophetic ignorance in the Olivet Discourse. Consequently, what doctrinal issues are really at stake here? One simply cannot maintain that the wording in Matthew 24:36 changes one’s basic theological convictions about Jesus, since the same sentiment is found in Mark. It is interesting that not once in *Misquoting Jesus* does Ehrman mention Mark 13:32, even though he explicitly discusses Matthew 24:36 in half a dozen places, inclusively suggesting that “nor the Son” here impacts our fundamental understanding of Jesus. But does the wording change our basic understanding of *Matthew’s* view of Jesus? Even that is not the case. Even if Matthew 24:36 originally lacked “nor the Son,” the fact that the Father *alone* has this knowledge

83 Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.295

84 Ambrose, *Fid*. 5.16.193

certainly implies the Son's ignorance (and the "alone" is found only in Matthew 24:36, not in Mark 13:32)."[85]

Wallace did not present any solution to get us out of this impasse; rather, he worsened it by acknowledging that the Son is lacking one of the features of a *God*. The truth that can be deduced from what was discovered from the earliest manuscripts is that the scribes were aware that the statement of Matthew 24:36 could not be reconciled with the belief in Jesus' deity. They succeeded in corrupting Matthew's text but failed to adjust the parallel passage in the second Gospel. So the earliest recovered reading of Matthew 24:36 exposes the non-orthodoxy of this text.

Basil in the fourth century did not think that the "alone" would prevent him from denying the ignorance of Jesus. He used the classic sophisticated hermeneutical logic of the Church to reconcile the corrupted expunged Matthew 24:36 with Mark 13:32: "What is noticeable in these passages is this; that Matthew says nothing about the ignorance of the Son, and seems to agree with Mark as to sense in saying but my Father only. Now I understand the word only to have been used in contradistinction to the angels, but that the Son is not included with His own servants in ignorance."[86] Basil's words tell us that the deletion of "nor the Son" from the Gospel of Matthew has a heavy theological significance, and it cannot be minimized by considering it to be only a marginal scribal distortion of late copies with no serious implications.

He is not Unique

John 9:4. "I must work the works of him that sent **me**, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

The earliest manuscripts (P^{66} P^{75} ℵ*) read, "πέμψαντός ἡμᾶς" [*pempsantos hēmas*], "sent us." The later scribes felt that the idea that Jesus and his disciples(?) were sent from God threatened the uniqueness of Jesus, *the only Son sent by God*, so they changed it to "πέμψαντός με" [*pempsantos me*], "sent me," for that reason, and maybe also to overcome the contradiction between John 9:4 and John 20:21, where Jesus is claiming that he is the one who sent the disciples: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Believing in the uniqueness of Jesus and the coherence of his sayings means not being faithful to the "original."

85 Daniel B. Wallace, "The Original New Testament Has Been Corrupted by Copyists So Badly That It Can't Be Recovered," pp.67-8

86 Basil, *letter* 236.2

The Trinity

It has been stressed in biblical dictionaries and encyclopedias that there is no clear-cut textual evidence for the trinity creed. For instance, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states that the trinity "is not a biblical doctrine in the sense that any formulation of it can be found in the Bible."[87] There is a single passage in the New Testament that teaches Trinity. The *Textus Receptus* had this text in 1John 5:7-8: "ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες *εν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ πατήρ, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα· καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἕν εἰσιν. καὶ τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἕν τῇ γῇ*, τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἕν εἰσὶν," which is in the King James Version, "For there are three that bear record *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth*, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." This is the only apparent textual proof for the trinity. The newest critical editions of the Greek New Testament agree that the italicised text is an apparent addition because it was inserted into a very few Greek manuscripts in the second millennium.

Daniel B. Wallace, in the most bizarre reply on the *Misquoting*, says, "The early church didn't know of this text, yet the council of Constantinople in A.D. 381 explicitly affirmed the Trinity. How could they do so without the benefit of a text that didn't get into the Greek New Testament for another millennium? The answer is simple: Constantinople's Statement was not written in a vacuum; the early church put into a theological formulation what they got out of the New Testament."[88] And that, "The Trinitarian formula found in late manuscripts of 1John 5:7 only *summarized* what they found; it didn't *inform* their declarations."[89] This is the height of deception and deceit. Wallace's answer was meant to keep us distant from the *prima facie* fact, which is "The Trinitarian formula found in late manuscripts of 1John 5:7 was made to legitimate the church's fabricated doctrine wholly absent from the Holy Scriptures."

It is noteworthy that the new critical texts do not deprive the Unitarians of any of their proof-texts. "Every text, formerly adduced by Unitarians in their own favour from the Old Version, will also be found in the New. There are no

87 J. D. Douglas and N. Hillyer, eds. *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1980, 3/1597

88 Daniel B. Wallace, "The Original New Testament Has Been Corrupted by Copyists So Badly That It Can't Be Recovered," p.70

89 Ibid., pp.70-1 [emphasis by Wallace]

lapsed verses in their case. Their old proof-texts have not lost any clearness; nay many of them speak, in their new dress, with an added force of testimony."[90]

The Crucified Son

The un-Crucified Jesus!

Matthew 27: 48-50. "And straightway one of them ran, and took a spunge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost."

We read in John 19:33 that after his death, Jesus was pierced in his side: "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water." (33-34). The earliest Matthew manuscripts, which include Matthew 27:49-50, Codex Sinaiticus (fourth century), Codex Vaticanus (fourth century), and Codex Ephraemi (fifth century), add, "*ἄλλος δὲ λαβὼν λόγχην ἔνυξεν αὐτοῦ τὴν πλευράν, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ὕδωρ καὶ αἷμα,*" "And another took a spear and pierced his side, and out came water and blood" after "whether Elias will come to save him." It is obvious that adding that clause is "the harder reading" because it contradicts what is said in John 19:33, where Jesus was pierced after his death, not before. From a medical standpoint, blood and water cease to flow and begin to coagulate after a person's death.

So, here the internal and external evidence, and the scientific evidence, support the originality of that passage in Matthew 27:49-50. The previous cogent testimonies made S. W. Whitney declare, "All things considered, we cannot resist the conclusion that the marginal reading is genuine, and should have an unquestioned place in Matthew's Gospel."[91] Accepting this fact means that Jesus was not killed because of his being hanged on the cross, as is believed by the church, but rather that he was killed by a spear. Pope Clement V. condemned in 1311 A.D. the idea that Jesus' side had been pierced while he was yet alive.[92] It is a heretical belief that has a scriptural proof from a canonical gospel.

90 Alexander Gordon, *Christian Doctrine in the Light of New Testament Revision*, p.24

91 S. W. Whitney, The Revisers' Greek Text: A Critical Examination of Certain Readings, Textual and Marginal," in *The Original Greek of the New Testament*, Boston: Silver, Burdett, 1892, 1/168

92 Ibid., 1/165

An Awkward scenario?

Hebrews 2:8-9. “Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he **by the grace** of God should taste death for every man.”

The “orthodox” belief held by the Church is that Jesus was crucified by the grace of God who sent his Son, the sinless divine being, for redemption of mankind, and that Jesus went by his will to the cross. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews had a different view; he believed that Jesus was crucified “χωρὶς θεοῦ” [*chōris theou*], “without God,” meaning that he was crucified against his will and without his approval, and that there was no covenant between the Father and the Son to shed the holy blood on the cross as a sacrifice.

The odd statement made in this canonical epistle deeply offended the “orthodox” scribes, who did not have the smallest doubt of the pre-arranged plan of God the father to make a voluntary sacrifice by giving his beloved Son to die on the painful cross as a ransom for many. This variant was understood too as a statement that it is only the human Jesus who suffered on the cross. Later Christian writers charged that the reading was a Nestorian fabrication (Ps.-Oecumenius; Theophylact).[93] These “pious” scribes had no choice but to change the bothersome “without God” to the “suitable” expression “χάριτι θεοῦ” [*chariti theou*], “grace of God.”

The corruption of the text was very extensive from the fourth century, the time of the Christianization of the Roman Empire[94], and this shows clearly how determined the early “orthodox” Christians were in creating their “orthodox” scriptures, to the point that they did not hesitate to distort the “original” readings if they could not keep them “orthodox”.[95]

Was He Crucified in Vain?

Luke 22:19–20. “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body **which is given for you: this do in**

93 C. R. Koester, *Hebrews: A new translation with introduction and commentary*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2008, p.218

94 Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.35 testified in the third century that the majority of the manuscripts had “without God.”

95 Bart Ehrman made a strong case for the originality of “without.” A must read study: *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp.146-50

remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

Bart Ehrman asked, "Did Luke understand that Jesus' death was an atonement for sin?" Then he answered by saying, "It depends on what you do with Luke 22:19–20. [...] Luke has eliminated Mark's references to Jesus' death as an atonement. The only remnant of that teaching is in some manuscripts of the Lord's Supper, where Jesus says that the bread is his body to be broken 'for you' and the cup is his blood poured out 'for you.' But in our earliest and best manuscripts, these words are missing (much of v. 19 and all of v. 20). It appears scribes have added them to make Luke's view of Jesus' death conform to Mark's and Matthew's."[96]

The scribes knew that Luke's theological view of Jesus' crucifixion was not compatible with the other Gospels, so they colored Luke's manuscripts to make them show that Jesus was crucified as an atonement.

Jesus' Ascension to Heaven

Mark 16:9-20. "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."

96 Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, pp.187-88

Luke 24:51. “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, **and carried up into heaven.**”

Daniel Wallace, like any devoted Christian who refuses to acknowledge the embarrassing gap between the old text and the growing dogmas in the history of the church, commented on the unauthenticated story in Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 (the woman caught in adultery), with the classical answer: “it needs to be stressed that these passages change no fundamental doctrine, no core belief-even though much emotional baggage is attached to them. The probability of their not having been part of the original text has been understood for more than a century, yet no theological formulations have been altered.”[97] The problem with this statement is that it is too superficial, and is therefore incapable of discerning the problem. The number one trouble with this answer is Wallace’s *atomic thinking*—seeing the problem as a group of independent objects.

In his remarks on the *Revised Version* (1881 A.D.), Alexander Gordon declared, “These two passages [end of Mark and the woman caught in adultery passage], put together, contain *more matter than the Epistle to Philemon*; while they embrace unique affirmations both of theological and of ethical doctrine. It is plain that the raising of unavoidable doubts as to the canonicity of considerable and important sections of the text, *opens the way to an inquiry more fundamental than is suggested by the mere excision of isolated verses*; though this in itself is sometimes startling enough.”[98]

The forged canonical end of Mark should not be seen as just a “number of words added to the text.” The problem is many-sided, and it needs to be treated with a lot of care and patience. We can summarize the real issues as follows:

- The narrations of the resurrection and appearances of Jesus in Mark are a later addition to the text.
- There are different endings of Mark in the manuscripts that surfaced in the early centuries.
- The abrupt close of Mark’s Gospel at verse number 8 is a puzzling ending for a religious-historical text.

97 Daniel B. Wallace, “The Original New Testament Has Been Corrupted by Copyists So Badly that It Can’t Be Recovered,” p.64

98 Alexander Gordon, *Christian Doctrine in the Light of New Testament Revision*, p.10 [italics mine].

- If the original ending was lost, as some think, why did that happen? Is it because of the inconvenience of the original termination of the story?
- The Gospel of Mark is the earliest canonical gospel.
- The Gospel of Mark is the main source of Matthew and Luke.
- Q, the other source of Matthew and Luke and the earliest record of Jesus' message as is held by the majority of scholars, also does not have the story of Jesus' resurrection and reappearance.
- From whence do Matthew and Luke acquire their versions of Jesus' resurrection and his reappearance?
- The narration of the bodily ascension of Jesus into heaven also existed in Luke 24:51, but many scholars declare that it is a later scribal insertion.[99] And that means that there is no story narration of the ascension in the Gospels.

So, the matter is more complex than Wallace tried to make it seem.

The Virgin Birth

The predominant view of the origin of the Gospel of Luke is that its author used different sources to build his text, the Gospel of Mark being one of these sources. Mark did not allude to the virgin birth, and that shows that he very likely did not know about it or that he did not believe in its historicity. When we read the Gospel of Luke, we note that its author adopted inconsistent traditions. He explicitly mentioned the virgin birth of Jesus, but he also used expressions discarding it.

Luke 2:33

"And **Joseph** and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him."

Luke 2:43

"And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and **Joseph** and his mother knew not of it."

The best manuscripts of the two previous verses have "ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ" [*ho patēr autou*], "his father" (Luke 2:33) and "οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ" [*hoi goneis autou*], "his parents" (Luke 2:43). The "faithful" scribes could not accept any suspicion being thrown on the virgin birth doctrine, so they handled the task of

99 Some versions omitted it: the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, and the Revised English Bible.

maintaining a homogeneous gospel attributed to Luke by changing the heretical allusion to "Joseph" in both verses.

It is worth noting here that the earliest preserved Syriac version of the gospels (Syriac Codex Sinaiticus-4th century) states in Matthew 1:16 that Joseph *begat* (ܐܘܠܕ) Jesus (KJV: And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus). E. J. Wilson adds: "the statement that Joseph begat him would seem to indicate that the term "virgin" was understood by the redactor of S[inaiticus] to apply to Mary only during the period of the betrothal, but that afterward Joseph fathered a son, and the virgin birth is therefore contradicted by S[inaiticus] (or at least not confirmed)."[100]

Conclusion

The conservative New Testament textual criticism scholar Wilbur N. Pickering summed up his essay on the Greek New Testament Text reconstructed according to the eclectic method (UBS/NA) by stating, "the eclectic text incorporates *errors* and *contradictions* that *undermine the doctrine of inspiration* and virtually *vitiate the doctrine of inerrancy*."[101]

So, if the earliest attainable text of the New Testament (1) proscribes the inerrancy of the holy books, and (2) disproves some of the fundamental church tenets, we have every reason to expect that the *autograph* would take us farther from the doctrine of the infallibility of the scriptures and its coherence with the church faith, because the inducements to corrupt the text were more intense in the *obscure zone,* where there were only a few copies in circulation and many newly formed, conflicting sects.

100 E. J. Wilson, *The Old Syriac Gospels, Studies and Comparative Translations* (Tr. G. A. Kiraz) Louaize, Lebanon; Piscataway, NJ: Notre Dame University; Gorgias Press, 2003, p.xlvii

101 Wilbur N. Pickering, "What Difference Does It Make?" in Jay P. Green, *Unholy Hands on the Bible: An Examination of Six Major New Versions*, p.574 [italics mine].

A Preserved Qur'an?

- What about an "obscure Zone" in the history of the Qur'an?
- Can we talk about a systematic preservation of the Qur'an?
- Are manuscripts the means of the preservation of the Qur'an?
- Did Uthman distort the Original Text?
- The ten accepted readings, are they original?
- The printed Qur'an: a reconstructed text (as the New Testament) or an inherited text?

The historical credibility of the Qur'ān has been under missionary attack from the time of the publishing of "*Περί Αιρέσεων,*" *Concerning Heresy,* by John of Damascus to the publishing of my work, *Fallacies, Lies, Forgeries, Myths*. This attack consists of a nonstop systematic discrediting of Islamic genius, creeds, and values in and out of the academic arena, backed up by religious and political lobbies.

The new tack taken by Christian debaters, which started in the twentieth century, is for a considerable number of them to admit that the New Testament was actually altered across the centuries, while at the same time insisting that Muslims have no right to doubt the originality of the New Testament, because the Qur'ān is, itself, corrupted. This critique has the force of a *tu quoque* argument.

We see this clearly fallacious argumentation, in one of the books of the South African missionary, John Gilchrist,

> We freely admit that there are variant readings in the Bible. […] We have never ceased to be amazed, however, at the general Muslim claim that the Qur'ān has never been changed whereas the Bible has allegedly been so corrupted that it is no longer what it was and therefore cannot be regarded as the Word of God. All the evidence history has bequeathed to us in respect of the textual history of the Qur'ān and the Bible suggests, rather, that both books are remarkably intact in the form in which they were originally written but that neither has escaped the presence, here and there, of variant readings in the text. We can only presume that the fond illusion of Qur'ānic inerrancy and Biblical corruption is the figment of pure expediency, a convenient way - indeed, as the evidence shows, a desperate and drastic

> way - of explaining away the fact that the Taurat and Injil are actually Christian rather than Islamic in content and teaching. Whatever the reason for this myth, we know we speak the truth when we say that the suggestion that the Qur'ān is unchanged while the Bible has been changed on many occasions is the greatest lie ever proclaimed in the name of truth.[1]

To ascertain the unadorned truth, one needs to (a) examine the history of the Qur'ān and weigh the evidence of the originality of this Holy book, (b) and the Islamic methodology to identify the original reading.

The Early History of the Qur'an

The Arabic word "Qur'ān" is derived, in the opinion of many scholars, from the verb "qara'a" which means "to read".[2] It is used to denote the holy book of Muslims or any part of it, as mentioned by the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) and this same book itself (Q. 2:185[3]; 4:82; 5:101; 6:19…). This distinguished scripture was not revealed to the Prophet all at once as one block of one hundred and fourteen chapters, rather its verses were revealed successively, as one verse, groups of verses, or even a whole chapter, across a time span of twenty-three years.

The record of the preservation can be deduced from the text itself as from the painstakingly recorded history.[4]

The preservation in the time of the Prophet

The Prophet was as keen to preserve the text of the Qur'ān as to convey its message to human kind. The fact of the Qur'an's divine origin, drove the Prophet's intense interest in this regard, and his obedience to the Divine commandment that he and his nation preserve its original message was enjoined in the Qur'an.

1 John Gilchrist, *The Textual History of the Qur'ān and the Bible*, http://fountain-of-light.org/bible_study_course_outline/bible/pdf/4.pdf (3/22/2011)

2 See Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-ʿirfān fī ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad zamarlī, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1995,1/15-6

3 The first number is for the chapter, and the second is for the verse.

4 No historical narration is accepted unless it has a sound chain of narrators and has no defect in its narrations (contradiction, historical errors, exaggeration…). One of the resources used here is "*Jamʿ al-Qur'ān, dirāsah taḥlīliyyah li-marwiyyātihi*," (Collecting the Qur'an, an analytic study for its historical narratives), by Akram al-dalīmī, published in Lebanon: Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyyah,, 2006

The Qur'ān conveys a divine promise:

﴿ إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴾

"Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur'an and indeed, We will be its guardian." (Q. 15:9)[5]

So, the preservation of the text was considered a crucial issue embodied in the heart of the message of the Prophet, and it was not a late concern that emerged after generations from the first writing of the text, or centuries as is the case with the New Testament.

The Qur'ānic revelation started in 610 A.D. The Prophet was so eager to memorize each verse revealed to him that he used to move his tongue to recite it while the Angel Gabriel was revealing it to him, fearing that he would forget it. The Qur'ān records this excitement and the promise of Allah to preserve this holy text,

﴿ لاَ تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِه إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَه فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَاهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَه ﴾

"Do not move your tongue with it to make haste with it, Surely on Us (devolves) the collecting of it and the reciting of it. Therefore when We have recited it, follow its recitation."

Thus, He was commanded to listen first to all that *Jibrīl* was reciting, then to repeat what was recited, so that he could memorize the verses,

﴿ وَلاَ تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِن قَبْلِ أَن يُقْضَى إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ ﴾

"[O Muhammad], do not hasten with [recitation of] the Qur'an before its revelation is completed to you" (Q. 20:114)

The Prophet was well aware there was a possibility that the Qur'ān could be distorted un-intentionally in his life in an environment of illiterate followers, which is why he announced that any of his followers who wrote down anything except the Qur'ān as he had recited it, should get rid of it[6].[7] It was thus that he was able to keep the holy book free from additions and deletions.

5 I used different English translations of the Qur'ān, and sometimes I change some words from a published translation to make the meaning more accurate. None of the changes made constitute a new meaning..

6 *Muslim*, *ḥadīth* no: 3004

7 This order was abrogated later only when these followers mastered writing and got used to differentiating between the Qur'ān and the prophetic sayings and actions.

The Qur'ān was spread swiftly and securely in the growing Islamic nation as incited by the instructions of the Prophet:

- The Prophet asked his scribes to write down each verse revealed to him shortly after he heard it from the angel *Jibrīl*.
- He recited the Qur'ān during prayers.
- He asked his Companions to recite it in front of him. [8]
- He ordered those who had learned the Qur'ān to teach those who had not yet learned it. [9]
- He urged Muslims to have the Qur'ān at the center of their studies and preaching. He said, "The best among you is the one who learns the Qur'ān and teaches it."[10]
- He made learning the Qur'ān a scale of piety among Muslims. He stated: "With this Book Allah exalts some people and lowers others."[11]
- He urged Muslims to make a practice of reading the Qur'ān so they would be rewarded generously in the hereafter. He said, "If anyone recites a letter from the Book of Allah then he will be credited with a good deed, and a good deed attains a tenfold reward. I do not say that *Alif Lam Mim* are one letter; but *Alif* is a letter, *Lam* is a letter and *Mim* is a letter."[12]
- He gave the privilege of leading the prayers to those who had memorized the Qur'ān, or learned it the best. [13]
- He condemned the forgetting of memorized verses as a grievous sin, and advised people to go through the Qur'ān regularly. He said, "Keep refreshing your knowledge of the Qur'ān, for I swear by Him in Whose Hand is the life of Muḥammad that it is more liable to escape than hobbled camels. [14]" [15]

The *muṣḥaf* (the written Qur'ān) was (1) *memorized* and (2) *recorded* from the time of the Prophet by the Companions of the Prophet on skins of

8 *Al-Bukhārī*, *ḥadīth* no: 5103; *Muslim*, hadīth-s no: 1903-5

9 Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, *ḥadīth* no: 23437

10 *Al- Bukhārī*, *ḥadīth* -s no: 5027-8

11 *Muslim*, *ḥadīth* no: 269

12 *Al-Tirmidhī*, *ḥadīth* no:3158

13 *Abū Dāwūd*, *ḥadīth* -s no: 582-90

14 *Al-Bukhārī*, *ḥadīth* -s no: , 5084-6; *Muslim*, hadīth-s no: 1878-80

15 See for more details M. M. al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'ānic Text*, pp.59-69

animals, ribs of palm-leaves, bones, and on tablets of white stone. It was recorded in writing, but was not assembled in one book. In these times Muslims were asked to recite the entire Qur'ān in a regular way. They applied its text to all the matters of life to which a religious commandment could apply. The Qur'ān deeply affected every personal, social, political, and economic aspect of the early Muslim nation. The words of the Qur'ān were the most repeated words of that era by everyone: men, women, children, educated and illiterate Muslims. The book was "not only the heart of a religion, the guide to a kingdom of Heaven, but a compendium of science and a political document, embodying a code of laws for a kingdom on earth."[16]

To sum up, the Prophet did his best and imposed all the precautions, to keep the Qur'ānic text pure in both forms: oral and written, because it was his sacred duty, and he was aware of the problems and challenges.

One might wonder why the Prophet did not order that one official copy be written in his lifetime. The answer is that there were different reasons for this, such as the fact that the verses of the Qur'ān were being revealed to him continuously, even up until his last days, so the book was still open, and that the multi-readings of the text could not fit one sole written official copy. The Qur'ān was written and its verses were arranged under the Prophet's regulation, so the text was perfectly preserved in a written form while the Prophet was alive, and that is what really matters in that period of time.

Therefore one cannot say that there was any "obscure zone" when referring to the history of the Qur'an as there was in the history of the text of the New Testament.

The preservation in the times of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar

One year after the Prophet's death, Abū Bakr, the first Caliph (the head of the Islamic state) ordered that the written Qur'ān, present with the Prophet's Companions after the Battle of *al-Yamāma* (11 A.H.[17]), be collected. He assigned Zeid b. Thābit (d.45 A.H.) to accomplish the mission.

Zeid, who had memorized the whole Qur'ān, and who had recited the whole text twice in front of the Prophet the year of his death, did not accept any Qur'ānic text as authentic unless it *existed in a written form, and had been written under the Prophet's supervision*.[18] This is indicative of how

16 Philip Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History*, Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1996, p.43

17 A.H.=after the Hegira (the immigration of the Prophet from Mecca to *al-Madīnah* in 622 A.D.)

18 See *al-Bukhārī*, *ḥadīth* no:4701

serious the rules imposed by the first Muslims were when collecting the text of the Qur'ān.

The result was, in effect, a recopying of the text which had been copied down before, under the supervision of the Prophet. This written preservation of the original text was augmented by the fresh memorization of it by the very believers who were gathering around their master. Consequently, nothing was changed in the message from the time of the Prophet; the text was preserved in the same pristine form.

This copy of the Qur'ān collected under the supervision of Zeid remained with Abū Bakr till he died, then with ʿUmar the second Caliph until the end of his life, and then with Ḥafṣah, ʿUmar's daughter, who was the Prophet's widow.[19]

The Companions had a firm belief that the Qur'ān was well preserved and that no one could corrupt it, as proclaimed by Ibn ʿUmar (73 AH).[20] A feeling of certitude and tranquility prevailed among the people who heard the Qur'ān directly from the Prophet.

The Qur'ān was an integral part of them, influencing their behavior, their thoughts and their emotions. They chose to learn the Qur'ān in a deliberate manner, as reported by Ibn Masʿūd who said that they used to learn only ten verses at a time, making sure they completely understood their meanings, and then they would start to apply them in their daily life. Only after this, would they proceed to learn further verses.[21]

At that same period of time, religious studies, such as *tafsīr* (hermeneutic) and *fiqh* (law studies) were established in Islamic centers all over the Islamic territories under the leadership and scholarship of the Companions, who had been the closest students of the Prophet. These elaborate and complex studies were mainly centered on the text of the Qur'ān.

The preservation in the time of ʿUthmān

At the time of the Caliphate of ʿUtmān b. ʿAffān, the Islamic territory expanded rapidly and became enormously vast, and an urgent need arose for an official version of the Qur'ān to be promulgated after it was found that many new Muslims in the different areas had no idea about the other

19 See *al-Bukhārī*, *ḥadīth* no: 5038

20 Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmā' wa al-ṣifāt*, *ḥadīth* no: 528

21 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, second edition, Cairo: Maktabat ibn Taymiyyah, [n.d.], 1/35

canonical readings. ʿUthmān (1) used the copy of the Qur'ān that was with Ḥafṣah, and (2) ordered a new team of the Companions to take up the task of making the new official copy, under the leadership of Zeid b. Thābet, one more time.[22]

The ʿUthmānic copy limited the accepted readings to what the skeleton of the Arabic consonantal (text without vowels and without diacritical marks) read, which meant excluding some authentic readings circulating at the time, for the purpose of preventing disputes between new Muslims who lived all over the vast Islamic state and were yet unaware of the multiple inherited readings. To ensure the accuracy of this official copy, Uthmān sent out five groups of educated reciters each of which had a copy of the written Qur'an, so the project would proceed under the watchful eye of official teachers. He ordered Zeid b. Thābit to teach the people of Madīnāh with the *muṣḥaf* of Madīnāh, and he sent ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Sā'ib (d. 70 A.H.) with the *muṣḥaf* of Mecca, al-Mughīrah b. Shihāb (d. 91 A.H.) with the *muṣḥaf* of *al-Shām*, Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Salmī (d. 73) with the *muṣḥaf* of *al-Kūfah*, and ʿĀmir b. Kais with the *muṣḥaf* of *al-Baṣrah*.

The ʿUthmānic project resulted in the making of several copies of the Qur'ān, which were sent to the largest cities of the Islamic state, with one copy being kept in the capital (*al-Madīnah*). All the Companions of the Prophet alive at that time approved of what ʿUthmān was doing as stated by Muṣʿab, the son of the Companion Saʿd b. abī Waqqāṣ, as narrated with a sound chain of narrators by ʿUmar b. Shabbah (173-262 A.H.)[23].[24]

22 *al-Bukhārī*, *ḥadīth* no: 4702

23 It is claimed that the Companion Ibn Masʿūd excluded two short sūrah-s (Q. 113-114) from his copy of the Qur'ān. The answer to this objection is this: (1) Some scholars, such as al-Nawawī, Ibn Ḥazm, and al-Bāqillānī, stated that the narrations that claim that Ibn Masʿūd was not thinking that these two sūrah-s are part of the Qur'ān are not authentic. This view is defended today by the scholar of *ḥadīth* M. M. al-Azami (*The History of the Qur'ānic Text*, pp.234-38). (2) Some other scholars accepted the authenticity of these narrations, but they stated that Ibn Masʿūd changed his mind later on, and they said that Ibn Masʿūd is the source of the reading of ʿĀṣim-Zir-Ibn Masʿūd, which means that he had in his *muṣḥaf* 114 sūrah-s. (3) A third group of scholars stated that Ibn Masʿūd was the only one not to include these two short sūrah-s in his copy of the Qur'ān, and no one followed him even though he had a huge number of students who became later on leaders of readings study groups in Iraq (such as al-Aswad b. Yazīd al-Nakhaʿī, who made it clear that he did not follow Ibn Masʿūd's view. See Ibn abī Shaybah, *ḥadīth* no: 30197). It is known from many authentic sayings and deeds of the Prophet that these two sūrah-s were part of the Qur'ān (narrated by Muslim, *ḥadīth* no: 814 and other books of *ḥadīth*-s; *al-Nasā'ī*, *ḥadīth*-s no: 905, 5439 and other books of *ḥadīth*-s) and were recited in the prayer in the lifetime of the Prophet (narrated by Abū Dāwūd, *ḥadīth* no: 1462 and other books of *ḥadīth*-s). Therefore the decision of Ibn

From that time forward, the ʿUtmānic *muṣḥaf* was the only official copy of the Qur'ān.

Could there be any doubts about the faithfulness of the ʿUthmānic project? The following facts will allay any such doubts:

- The short span of time between the death of the Prophet and the distribution of the written copies of the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf*, which was only thirteen to fifteen years.
- The dedication and eagerness of the head of the Islamic state, and the presence of a large number of scholars who had already heard the same Qur'ān from the Prophet himself.
- Using the original text collected in the time of Abū Bakr.
- Having Zeid b. Thābit at the head of team.

Authentication of the Qur'anic Readings

The Prophet of Islam said in a *mutawātir*[25] *ḥadīth* that the Qur'ān is revealed in seven *aḥruf*. This *ḥadīth* explains the multiple readings[26] for the

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Masʿūd, if considered authentic, cannot be taken seriously because it goes against the view of all the others Companions and it offers no proof to validate itself. The same thing should be said about the claim that Ibn Masʿūd did not have the first sūrah: al-Fātiḥah in his copy. There is an overwhelming number of *ḥadīth*-s that tell that al-Fātiḥah is part of the Qur'ān (*al-Bukhāri*, *ḥadīth* no: 5057 and other books of *ḥadīth*-s) and all the other companions had it in their copies. Ibn Masʿūd himself said when he was asked to write down this *sūrah* in his copy, that then he has to write it down before each *sūrah* (as narrated by ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd), which means that he was believing that it is a qur'ānic text but he felt that it should be proceding each *sūrah* if written in his copy, so he preferred not having it there. (See ʿAbd Allāh al-Judayʿ, *Al-Muqaddimāt al-Asāsiyyah fī ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*, Leeds: Islamic Research Centre, 2001, pp.103-21). It was reported too by Ḥammād b. Salamah that the *muṣḥaf* of Ubayy had two extra short *sūrah* -s (known elsewhere in the Islamic tradition as prophetic supplication). This report "is completely spurious because of a major chain defect, as an unaccounted-for gap of at least two to three generations between Ubayy's death (d. ca. 30 Hegira) and Hammād's (d. 167 Hegira)" (*The History of the Qur'ānic Text*, pp.238-39)

24 ʿUmar b. Shabbah, *Tārikh al-Madinah*, 3/1004

25 Mutawātir: A tradition handed down by so many distinct chains of narrators that it is inconceivable that they could have agreed upon an untruth.

26 I agree with al-Azami that "the term 'variants' is one that I dislike using in such cases because a variant arises, by definition, from uncertainty. If the original author pens a sentence one way, and the sentence is then corrupted due to scribal errors, then we have introduced a principle of uncertainty; a subsequent editor who is unable to distinguish the correct wording from the incorrect will place what he believes to be the correct version in the text, whilst citing the others in margins. Such is the variant reading. But the Qur'ān's case differs distinctly because the Prophet Muḥammad, Allah's sole vicegerent for the receipt and diffusion of *waḥy*, himself taught specific verses in multiple ways. There is no principle of doubt here, no fog or confusion, and the word 'variant' fails to convey this. Multiple is a far more accurate description." (*The History*, p.192)

same Qur'ānic passage as known in the early time of Islam. There are many interpretations of the prophetic expression "seven *aḥruf*[27]".[28] Whatever its exact meaning, it includes, as witnessed by other authentic sayings of the Prophet and the readings as found in the codices of the Companions, differences in the form, the pronunciation, the order, or the existence of word(s) in some passages.

No reading can be accepted as legitimate today unless it satisfies three cumulative conditions:

1. The reading has to reach us through authentic chains of narrators.
2. The reading has to coincide with the script of one of the copies of the Qur'ān distributed by the third Caliph ʿUthmān.
3. The reading has to be compatible with accepted grammatical Arabic constructions.[29]

There is no way to compare these readings with those of the New Testament as known in its manuscripts, because all the canonical readings of the Qur'ān have come to us directly from the lips of the prophet of Islam by an overwhelming number of people, starting with his contemporaries, who memorized each and every verse revealed. Compare this with the readings of the New Testament books that were written later on. The Qur'ānic readings known by the prophet of Islam were transmitted by him to his followers, while, in the case of the New Testament, the differences between the readings were not known to the authors.

The Manuscripts in the Islamic Scale

The history of the Qur'ān is known to us from the time of its revelation to the present day. The details of its transmission are clear, with no vagueness. It is known, not hidden, and detailed, not outlined. There is no need to rely on the testimony of the manuscripts. It is a situation drastically different than that of the New Testament which solely based on manuscripts.

Islamically, in application of the classical rules of the Qur'ān and of the science of *ḥadīth* (the recorded sayings and deeds of the Prophet), Muslims do not consider manuscripts as an acceptable evidence for proving the

27 The Arabic word *aḥruf* is the plural of *ḥarf*, which means literally a letter or a word.

28 See the different interpretation of the prophetic term, Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan*, UK: Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 1999, pp.174-79

29 See Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-ʿAshr*, ed. Muhammad Ali al-Ḍabbāʿ, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyyah, [n.d.],1/9

originality of the holy texts. Manuscripts written by unknown people, in unknown circumstances, cannot make the case for an unaltered text or its originality, by itself.

In the science of *ḥadīth*, "a reference to the knowledge taken from a written source without audition, licensing or transference"[30], or *wijādah*, is not accepted as an authentic way of narration by the majority of Muslim scholars. The minority who do accept it state that it can be approved only when special conditions obtain. Almost none of these conditions can be met as regards New Testament manuscripts.

Methodologically, any holy text surviving only through manuscripts written by anonymous scribes cannot be taken seriously enough to impose the authority of its words and message, because it cannot prove its originality. Thus, the New Testament fails soundly, in the first stage of the process of authenticating the Word of God, because it is founded on frail bases.

The manuscripts of the New Testament fail to give us the *certitude* we need regarding the sought after Word of God, but, still, they can provide information which can help in tracing the historical journey of the text.

The Testimony of the Extant Manuscripts

Scholars have different opinions about the number of copies made by ʿUthmān. Most of them agree that there were four or five, although some have said that the number was larger than that.[31] Muslims preserved some of these copies for varying periods of time before their disappearance, which shows that the written text of the Qur'ān was the same as the text memorized by so many in the first centuries of the Islamic Nation. An original copy that had a text different from the circulating text would surely have given rise to problems and conflicts, and that clearly, never occurred.

Following is evidence by witnesses of the preservation of these copies:

A- The Original Preserved Copies

Unlike the original manuscripts of the books of the New Testament, the original manuscripts of the Qur'an were widespread and accessible to people in the earliest time of Islam. It was a special privilege that reinforced the feeling of certitude in that living nation.

30 'Uthmān b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *An Introduction to the Science of the Ḥadīth: Kitab Maʿrifat Anwāʿ ʿIlm al-Ḥadīth*, tr. Eerik Dickinson, UK: Garnet & Ithaca Press, 2006 , p.125

31 See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fi ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, Beirūt: Mo'assasat al-Risāla, 2008, p.134

It is true that the Islamic nation did not feel the need to depend on these original manuscripts to ensure the authenticity of the text in their copies, because copying these originals was done from the very outset under the supervision of the head of the state and scholars throughout the Islamic territory.

Here are some historical testimonies of the history of some of the originals.[32]

Al-Muṣḥaf al-Imām: This *muṣḥaf* is the copy that ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān kept for himself. It was maintained until the beginning of the third century of the Hegira, 9th century A.D. Abū ʿAmr al-Dānī (d. 444 A.H. -1052 A.D.) narrated that Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām al-Baghdādī (d. 222 A.H. -837 A.D.) said that: "It was taken to me from some prince's treasure and I saw [ʿUthmān] blood on it."[33]

Muṣḥaf of al-Shām: The famous scholar *Ibn Kathīr* (774 A.H.- 1372 A.D.) said, "And concerning the original ʿUtmānic copies of the Qur'ān, the most famous of them is the one in *al-Shām*[34] in a corner in Damascus Mosque, towards the east where the Imam leads the prayer, in the place inspired by the remembrance of God Almighty. In the past it used to be in the city of Tiberia. Then it was moved to Damascus around 518 Hegira [1124 A.D.]. I did see it, and found it to be a great, glorious book with beautiful clear hand written dark ink on parchment which seems to be from camel skin."[35]

Ibn Jubayr (d. 614 A.H.-1217 A.D.) had also seen it in the Damascus mosque. He said, "In the eastern corner next to the new spot where the Imam leads the prayer, a big closet has in it one of the *muṣḥaf* of ʿUthmān may Allah be pleased with him. This is the *muṣḥaf* that ʿUthmān had sent to the *al-Shām*. Every day the closet is opened after prayer, and people come to it in order to touch or kiss it for blessings, it is usually too crowded near it."[36]

32 Some Muslims claim, erroneously, that the Tashkent *muṣḥaf* is one of the originals made by ʿUthmān's team. Actually carbon-dating and palaeographic studies suggest a date in the second century of the Hegira. (See F. Déroche, "Manuscripts Of The Qur'an," in J. D. McAuliffe, ed. *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill: Leiden & Boston, 2003, 3/261)

33 Abū ʿAmr al-Dānī, *Almuqniʿ fī Rasm Maṣāḥif al-Amṣār*, Cairo: Maktabāt al-Kulliyyat al-Azharyyah, [n.d], pp.23-4

34 The area that includes what is called today Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and some parts of the territories that surrounds them.

35 Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, ed. Abū Isḥāq Alḥuwayni, Cairo: Maktabat b. Taimiyyah, 1416 A.H., p.89

36 Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. William Wright, revised by de Goeje, M.J., Leiden:

Ibn Faḍl al-ʿAmrī, in the eighth century of the Hegira- fourteenth century A.D., said when describing the Mosque of Damascus, "In its left side, there is the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf*."[37]

Al-Harawī (d. 611 A.H.- 1214 A.D.) and Abū al-Qāsim al-Tajībī (d. 697 A.H.-1297 A.D.), saw it and described it too.[38]

Muṣḥaf of Mecca: Information about the *muṣḥaf* of Mecca is given by different witnesses; Ibn Jubayr saw it in Mecca when he visited the city in 578 A.H. - 1182 A.D. Abū al-Qāsim al-Tajībī saw it too in Mecca at the end of 696 A.H. -1297 A.D. Al-Samhūdy who died in 911 A.H. - 1505 A.D mentioned it in his book *Wafā' al-Wafā*.[39]

B- The Wealth of Early Manuscripts

Copying the *muṣḥaf* was a religious duty that the nation of Islam took seriously from the outset. The desire for copies of the Qur'an wherever Muslims lived spawned a noble business that flourished in the big cities[40] and was under the strict supervision of scholars who inaugurated, from the earliest centuries, a distinct discipline within the Qur'ān studies called "the science of the writing of the *muṣḥaf* "*ʿilm rasm al-muṣḥaf*". Many scholars from the first century and the beginning of the second were considered as authorities in that science. In *al-Madīnāh*, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. hurmuz al-Aʿraj (d.117? 119? A.H.) and Nāfiʿ (d. 169 A.H.). In *al-Baṣrah*, ʿAṣim al-Jaḥdarī (d. 128 A.H.) and Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlā' (d. 153 A.H.). In al-Kūfah, Ḥamzah al-Zaiyyāt (d. 156 A.H.) and al-Kisā'ī (d. 189 A.H.), In *al-Shām*, Ibn ʿĀmir (d. 118 A.H.) and Yaḥyia al-Dhmārī (d.145 A.H.).[41] Moreover, we are aware of at least eleven books written in the second century of the Hegira solely on that science.[42] There was no *obscure zone* in the history of the transmission of the *muṣḥaf* ; it is a long chain with connected rings.

Brill ,1907, p.268

37 Ibn Faḍl al-ʿAmrī, *Masālik al-Abṣār*, 1:195 (Quoted by Abū ʿabd Allāh al-Zinjāny, *Tarikh al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Aʿlamī, 1969, p.67)

38 See Saḥar al-Sayyid ʿabd al-ʿazīz Sālim, *Aḍwā'on ʿAlā Muṣḥaf ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān wa Riḥlatihi Sharqan wa Gharban* (Lights on the *Muṣḥaf* of ʿUthmān and Its Journey to the East and the West), Alexandria: Shabāb al-Jamiʿ, [n.d], p.129

39 Ibid., pp.128-29

40 Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qurʾān," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 118, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1998), pp.10-4

41 See Ghānim Qaddūrī Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf: dirāsah lughawiyyah tārīkhiyyah*, Baghdād, al-ʿIrāq: al-Lajnah al-Waṭaniyyah lil-Iḥtifāl bi-Maṭlaʿ al-Qarn al-Khāmis ʿAshar al-Hijrī, 1982, pp.164-67

42 See the titles of the books in ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Faḍl, *Qirā'at ibn Kathīr wa Atharuha fī al-Dirāsāt*

Even though no Muslim country ever set out to dig for the earliest manuscripts or even to catalogue *all* those that it possessed- the quest for these manuscripts and their dating only being made by non-Muslim scholars, except for the works of the Turkish T. Altikulaç- we possess today many manuscripts that have been conclusively dated to the first century of the Hegira, Some of these are:

1. A copy attributed to Caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān. Amanat Khizana, Topkapi Saray, Istanbul, no. I.
2. Another copy ascribed to ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, Amanat Khizana, Topkapi Saray, no. 208. This copy has some 300 folios and it is missing a portion from both ends.
3. Another ascribed to ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān. Amanat Khizana, Topkapi Saray, no. 10. It is only 83 folios and contains notes written in the Turkish language naming the scribe.
4. Attributed to Caliph ʿUthmān at the Museum of Islamic Art, Istanbul. It lacks folios from the beginning, middle, and end. Dr. al-Munaggid dates it to the second half of the first century.
5. A large copy with 1000 pages, written between 25-31 A.H. at Rawaq al-Maghariba, al-Azhar, Cairo.
6. Attributed to Caliph ʿUthmān, The Egyptian Library, Cairo.
7. Ascribed to Caliph ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib on palimpsest. Muzesi Kutuphanesi, Topkapi Saray, no. 36E.H.29. It has 147 folios.
8. Ascribed to Caliph ʿAlī. Amanat Khizana, Topkapi Saray, no. 33. It has only 48 folios.
9. Ascribed to Caliph ʿAlī. Amanat Khizana, Topkapi Saray, no. 25E.H.2. Contains 414 Folios.
10. Ascribed to Caliph ʿAlī. Raza Library, Rampur, India, no. 1. Contains 343 Folios.
11. Ascribed to Caliph ʿAlī, Sanaa, Yemen.
12. Ascribed to Caliph ʿAlī, al-Mashhad al-Husaini, Cairo.
13. Ascribed to Caliph ʿAlī, 127 folios. Najaf, Iraq.
14. Ascribed to Caliph ʿAlī. Also in Najaf, Iraq.
15. Attributed to Ḥusain b. ʿAlī (d. 50 A.H.), 41 folios, Mashhad, Iran.
16. Attributed to Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, 124 folios, Mashhad, Iran, no. 12.
17. Attributed to Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, 124 folios. Najaf, Iraq.

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al-Naḥwiyyah, unpublished PhD dissertation, pp.60-5

18. A copy, 332 folios, most likely from the early first half of the first century, Hegira. The Egyptian Library, Cairo, no. 139 Masahif
19. Ascribed to Khudayj b. Muʿawiya (d. 63 A.H.) written in 49 A.H. Amanat Khizana, Topkapi Saray, no. 44. It has 226 folios.
20. A *muṣḥaf* in Kufic script penned in 74 A.H. Amanat Khizana, Topkapi Saray, no. 2. It has 406 folios.
21. A copy scribed by Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in 77 A.H. The Egyptian Library, Cairo, no. 50 Masahif
22. A copy in the Museum of Islamic Art, Istanbul, no. 358. According to Dr. al-Munaggid it belongs to the late first century, Hegira.
23. A copy with 27 folios. The Egyptian Library, Cairo, no. 247.
24. Some 5000 folios from different manuscripts at the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, many from the first century, Hegira. Some of them, Arabe 328(a), has lately been published as a facsimile edition,[43] and Arabe 330g + Is. 1615 II.
25. Is. 1615 I + Ms. 68, 69, 70, 699 + *Sotheby's* 2008, Lot 3 + TR:490-2007. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland; Museum Of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar; Private collections.
26. DAM 01–27.1. Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt, Yemen.
27. Ms. Or. 2165. British Library, London.
28. DAM 01-25.1. Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt, Yemen.
29. DAM 01-29.1. Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt, Yemen.
30. Christies 2011, Lot 10. Private collection.
31. *Sotheby's* 2011, Lot 1. Private collection.
32. M a VI 165. Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, Germany.[44]

The Italian orientalist Sergio Noja Noseda, with F. Déroche, studied the *ḥijāzī* script manuscripts of the Qur'ān, written on parchment, that belongs to the first century of the Hegira, and he concluded that *almost eighty-three percent of the Qur'ānic text*[45] *is available in these manuscripts*.[46] It is worth noting that

43 See K. ʿAwwād, *Aqdam al-Makhṭūṭāt al-ʿArabīa fi Maktabāt al-ʿālam*, pp.31-59 (Quoted by M. M. al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'ānic Text*, pp. 348-49)

44 See ʿAbdullah David and M. S. M. Saifullah, Concise List Of Arabic Manuscripts Of The Qur'ān Attributable To The First Century Hijra,

http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Mss/hijazi.html (6/2/2012)

45 Compare that with the absence of any New Testament manuscripts of the first century A. D.!

46 F. Déroche and S. N. Noseda, eds. *Sources de la Transmission Manuscrite du Texte Coranique. I. Les manuscrits de style hijazi.Volume 2. Tome I. Le manuscrit Or. 2165 (f. 1 à 61) de la British Library*,

these two scholars did not include in their study the Qur'ānic text written in papyri, nor the *ḥijāzī* parchments from Sana'a, nor the ones written in Kufic script.

Those early manuscripts confirmed that the Qur'ānic text was not affected by any early religious schism, political events, or newly absorbed cultures. It is the same text all over the first century of the Hegira.[47]

The manuscripts of the Qur'ān collated in the twentieth century refute missionaries' claims that the manuscripts testify to the corruption of the text. The Reverend Dr. Muḥammad Hamidullah writes, "An Institute for Qur'ānic Research was set up. The idea was to collect all the oldest available copies of the Holy Qur'ān, in original or photocopies. The process of collection lasted for three generations. When I was at the University of Paris in 1933, the third Director of the Institute, Mr. Pretzl, came to Paris to get photocopies of all the ancient manuscripts of the Holy Qur'ān available in the Public Library of Paris. The professor told me personally at the time (1933) that the Institute had 43000 photocopies of the Holy Qur'ān and that the work of collation was proceeding apace. During the Second World War, a bomb hit the building of the Institute destroying the edifice, the library and the staff.[48] An interim report published shortly before the beginning of the Second World War stated, *inter alia,* that the work of collation of the Qur'ānic manuscripts had not yet been completed. But the result of the examination conducted until then suggested that while some mistakes of calligraphy had been detected in the manuscripts, not a single discrepancy in the text had been discovered. A calligraphic or typographical error found in one manuscript does not recur in another. Suppose, for example, that in a manuscript of the Qur'ān one word is missing from the text. This mistake will remain confined only to that very manuscript; the rest will have the complete text."[49]

London: Fondazione Ferni Noja Noseda, Leda, and British Library, 2001, p. xxvii

47 The unintentional mistakes made by scribes while reproducing new copies, which is a usual phenomenon whatever the document is, cannot disprove this result. No Christian apologist can argue against that.

48 It was found out just a few years ago that the rolls of film were hidden during the previous decades by the library's former curator. A fresh study of the texts available in the rolls is being held in a project launched by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Science and Humanities. (See Andrew Higgins, "The Lost Archive," in *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 Jan. 2008)

49 Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Emergence of Islam*, tr. Afzal Iqbal, India: Adam Publishers, 1993, p.22

That is a fact which was even acknowledged by Arthur Jeffery, who was attempting, in his study, to prove the corruption of the Qur'ānic text. He said, "Practically all the early Codices and fragments that have so far been carefully examined, show the same type of text, such variants as occur being almost always explainable as scribal errors."[50]

Wallace's Seven Fables

In his non-stop attack on Ehrman's books, articles, and lectures, Wallace invented a new strategy to discredit Ehrman's evaluation of the integrity of the New Testament text. He claimed that the major objections that Ehrman had on the New Testament are "the right analysis but for the wrong religions." Ehrman's critique, he said, about theological motives for corrupting the scriptures, describes Islam far more than Christianity.[51]

I think we need to go through his misrepresentation of the history of the Qur'ān and his inaccurate claims about the New Testament to see why Wallace fails one more time in rescuing the New Testament, and how textual criticism can be defiled when it starts to be motivated by missionary's concerns. Wallace presented the following seven comments by which he sought to prove that the catastrophic distortion of the scriptures as exposed by Ehrman should be directed to the Qur'ān and not to the New Testament:

First: A heavy orthodox editing of the Qur'ān in the first century was geared toward "orthodoxy," while the New Testament was not exposed to such an experience in its earliest decades, which, as argued by Ehrman, were marked by free, even wild copying.

Answer:
(1) ʿUthmān did not change the text, he did not create a new one, he did not add passages nor did he delete clauses, he did not interfere at all when making the official copy. All that he did was to inaugurate a project to limit the number of the authentic readings.
(2) Claiming that the ʿUthmānic project was driven by *orthodoxy* and *hereticism* is sheer misinformation which cannot be proved through an analysis of the Qur'ānic text or of its history. Many authentic readings ascribed to the Companions of the Prophet[52] not incorporated in the

50 Arthur Jeffery's review of "The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Kur'anic Development, by Nabia Abbott," in *The Moslem World*, vol. 30 (1940), p. 191

51 Daniel B. Wallace, *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament*, p.34

52 The ones that reached us through sound chains of narrators.

ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf* are recorded in the books of the exegesis of the Qur'ān or the *Qirā'āt* [readings], and none of them counters the Islamic orthodox teaching.
(3) Islamic history recorded many struggles in the first century of the Hegira, but none of them has to do with any disagreement between the Companions about the "orthodoxy" tendency of the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf*.
(4) We have proved in this book that we are absolutely unable to find the original text of the New Testament, which is something that prevents the Christian apologists from negating the hypo-thesis of heavy editing that was "geared toward orthodoxy."
(5) It was proven with overwhelming evidence that the New Testament was a "living text" in the two first centuries, the formative period of the "orthodoxy" as a doctrine and canon, which gives us good reason to believe in a *spontaneous* orthodox editing of the text.
(6) The early Christian sects of the two first centuries accused each other of corrupting some books of the New Testament, and that is clear when we find that some of these books were "canonized" in the "heretical circles," but in a different version. The well-known examples are:

- The Marcionites had Luke's version[53] and some of Paul's epistles, and it seems that their version lacked all prophecies of Christ's coming, as well as the infancy account and the baptism.[54] Many scholars, such as Walter Bauer, assert that Marcion was "the first systematic collector of the Pauline heritage."[55] Hypothetically, we can assume from the apparent theological divergences between Marcionism and "Orthodoxism" that theses two groups did not share one authentic text, a fact partially proved by the reconstructed version of the Marcionites' scriptures.

53 The fathers of the church accused Marcion of corrupting the original version of Luke (See Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 4.6.2). Some modern scholars believe that the Marcion gospel pre-dated the Luke gospel (See Charles B. Waite, *History of the Christian Religion to the Year Two-Hundred*, Chicago: C.V. Waite, 1881).

54 Even though Marcion's gospel disappeared, scholars worked on reconstructing it through portions quoted from it by the fathers of the church. You can read Zahn's edition in T. Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1892, 2/455-494

55 Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel, eds. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, p.221

- The Ebionites had their own version of Matthew's Gospel that lacks the first two chapters[56] and possibly stresses that Jesus is a human being as is the belief of the members of this sect.[57]

(7) The heavy editing in the history of the "orthodox" church started with the writing of the canonical books. It was a *selective* act towards the oral tradition, which was the fountain that flows with both those which will be called later "orthodox" and "heretical" teachings.

As proclaimed by Thomas Kazen, there is no reason to believe that the first century saw the birth of four gospels only.[58] Thus, the oral tradition of the first century was the source of the religious writings of that era which were subjective selections from conflicting traditions.

(8) The second heavy editing, which includes new dogmatic views, is the change made to the Marcan gospel by Matthew and Luke when they used its text as the base of their versions.

(9) The historical, chronological, and theological tendencies in the Gospel of John indicate that the author of the fourth Gospel dealt differently with Jesus' life and teachings than the Synoptic Gospels when editing the oral tradition later on, at the end of the first century.[59]

(10) The Pauline Christology is remarkably different from the view spread in the Gospels[60], which indicates plainly that Paul worked hard for a "heavy self-editing" of the received oral tradition.

(11) The ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf* was selected from authentic tradition using a strict methodology so that no foreign text could possibly be added to the holy collected text, so as to provide a canonized copy of the Qur'ān for the growing Muslim Nation, while the New Testament is selected from a mixed tradition resulting in the imposition of *only* the "orthodox" tradition, without

56 Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.26; 2.21

57 This gospel is preserved in a few quotations in the writings of Epiphanius.

58 Thomas Kazen, "Sectarian Gospels for Some Christians? Intention and Mirror Reading in the Light of Extra-Canonical Texts," in *The New Testament Studies* 51. 4 (2005), p.576

59 See Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth*, San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1995, pp.177-83

60 Johannes Lehmann writes, "What Paul proclaimed as 'Christianity' was sheer heresy which could not be based on the Jewish or Essene faith, or on the teaching of Rabbi Jesus. But, as Schonfield says, 'The Pauline heresy became the foundation of Christian orthodoxy and the legitimate church was disowned as heretical.'" (Johannes Lehmann, *The Jesus Report*, tr. Michael Heron, London: Souvenir Press, 1972, p.128)

there being any serious guarantee that what was selected was, in effect, the authentic tradition.

Second: Wallace accused ʿUthmān of claiming that his "canonical" text was the exact equivalent of the autographs after destroying the nonconforming manuscripts, while the defective or deteriorating copies of the New Testament manuscripts were not destroyed but hidden.

Answer:
(1) ʿUthmān destroyed all the authentic readings except "some,"[61] while we know that the "orthodox" church did destroy all the other gospels and religious writings of the so-called "heretics" without refuting their historicity or their conformity to the authentic tradition. It is well known that the canon of the New Testament is a subjective selection[62] that starts off being labeled as orthodox, but which did not prove its self-orthodoxy. So, with ʿUthmān we do not doubt the authenticity of the readings he kept; in contrast, we are left on the Christian side without a real proof that what was canonized was selected by scientific criteria to be considered authentic. We can see this incomparable situation from another side, which is that the Companions minimized the data of the authentic readings they received directly from the prophet, while late Christian generations picked up some known books to be considered authentic and authoritative without giving solid reasons to eliminate our doubts about the huge gap of time between the creation of these books and their canonization.
(2) The paucity of information we encounter when researching the New Testament texts of the early Christian decades is a historical fact that opposes any claimed certitude that the material which was copied by the later generations was not a re-edited version made by the disciples of the authors or by their disciples when only very few copies were circulating. Surely, we cannot register our ignorance as positive proof for the preservation of an old text.

61 The one consonantal text chose in the time of ʿUthmān is compatible with some readings which go back to the prophet, so we should talk about a number of readings approved by the ʿUthmānic consonantal text.

62 Many different lists of the "accepted books" existed in the first centuries. "Previous to Athanasius (d. 373 A. D.) there is no one of the many lists adopted in the East and West which exactly coincides with that now in vogue. After Athanasius, the question of including certain books, now discarded, or of excluding certain others, now included, was ardently debated for centuries before the present, practically universal acquiescence in the Athanasian list was attained." (Benjamin W. Bacon, "The Canon of the New Testament," in *The Biblical World*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Feb., 1903), p.115)

(3) ʿUthmān kept only part of the authentic Qur'ānic readings and destroyed the rest, while the "orthodox" Christians created books, then attributed them to famous characters who were close to Jesus so that they would be regarded as authoritative.[63] The ʿUthmānic project was a work dealing with a large body of authentic data, while the Christian canon was working mainly outside the true early Jesuit tradition.

(4) Why should ʿUthmān be blamed for not including all the original readings in the *muṣḥaf* which he ordered to be produced, while:

- The evangelists did not record all of Jesus' sayings.[64]
- Paul quoted a saying he attributed to Jesus that is not found in the gospels.[65]
- We can find in patristic literature sayings which are attributed to Jesus that are not found in the canonical scriptures.[66]

63 It is very common to read in the academic books that the Gospels and many of the other New Testament books were written by "unknown" authors. We can cite as examples:

- "All the gospels originally circulated anonymously. Authoritative names were later assigned to them by unknown figures in the early church. In most cases, the names are guesses or perhaps the result of pious wishes." (Robert Walter Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: New Translation and Commentary*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997, p. 20)
- "This gospel [of John], like the other three, is anonymous, and all that we can really know about the author must be derived from his writings." (Wilbert F. Howard, *The Interpreter's Bible, Volume 8, The Gospel According To St. Luke and St. John*, ed. George Buttrick, New York: Abingdon Press, 1952, pp.440-41)
- "Each of the four Gospels has its own individuality. Redaction, criticism, and narrative analysis uncover differences of language, style, and composition, differing theological concepts, and differing authorial intentions. Their anonymity is a common characteristic." (Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p.259)

64 John 21:24-25: "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen"

65 Acts 20:35: "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

66 See James Donehoo, *The Apocryphal and Legendary Life of Christ: being the whole body of the Apocryphal gospels and other extra canonical literature which pretends to tell of the life and words of Jesus Christ, including much matter which has not before appeared in English*, New York: The Macmillan Company, ١٩٠٣, pp.٢٤٢-٦٥

So the debate should be limited to the preservation of the original holy text that the earliest believers of the first generation following the two Revelations in question want to preserve, not all the text coming from the original source (Qur'ānic readings for Muslims, oral tradition for Christians).

Third: "The closest we come to heavy-handed control for NT MSS did not occur until at least the ninth century, long after the major Christological disputes had ended. Even then, we do not see defective MSS getting destroyed."

Answer:
(1) Establishing indisputably the authenticity of the transmission of the Qur'ānic text during the lives of the majority of the closest Companions of the Prophet should be considered to be the most unequivocal proof of the faithfulness of the transmission of the Qur'ān. In contrast, we can see incontestably that we have no fixed text of the New Testament, and that proliferation of copies made of it was accompanied by the deterioration of the quality of the text. The earliest known history of the New Testament manuscripts starts from the second half of the second century, and this history chronicles the fact that the text was not stabilized as has been demonstrated before. The most crucial change in the text occurred in the four earlier centuries, which is the formative period of the Christian dogma.
(2) The noticeable rigidity of Christian doctrine in later centuries does not confute the evidence of the existence of early waves of dogmatic corruption of the New Testament. The earliest signs for the corruption of the New Testament are good reason to believe that the early uncontrolled manuscripts shifted from a primitive autograph to a more refined text under the pressure of the genesis of Christian sectarian groups, which were looking for a divine authority for their dogmas.
(3) It is true that the later manuscripts were not destroyed, but the earliest ones did not survive, and the autograph disappeared forever, with no trace in the oral tradition of the first generation (or the generation of the authors).

Fourth: The uncontrolled copying of the manuscripts of the New Testament is a decisive argument against the allegation of a proto-orthodox conspiracy. The manuscripts of the Alexandrian text-type look so much like each other because they were in a relatively pure line of transmission.

Answer:
(1) Losing the original text forever is the main issue, and the starting point for discussing what the autograph used to look like. Anyway, it is enough for

us to make the case that since there is no guarantee that the perished original text reached the third century without being seriously modified, the "believer" should not rely on text, doubts about which are hovering over it from all sides.

(2) While I do not believe, nor can I negate, the proposition that a *systematic* corruption of the text was made by the "orthodox" Church, I do maintain that the "wild copying by untrained scribes" was the cause of the phenomenon of the unintentional alterations of the text and the bad quality of many early copies, and of the wave of changes made by scribes in their regrettable attempts to defend orthodox belief and to prove the inerrancy of the scriptures. And this is what has been proven in the present work.

(3) Wallace believes that the Byzantine text-type differs notably from the Alexandrian text-type, and that the Byzantine text-type was the official "version" of the Church from the ninth century, but he does not believe that it was the result of a late change through a conspiracy. He believes too that the era when the Byzantine text-type was created and proliferated did see a "wild copying by untrained scribes" and a "proto-orthodoxy" in the copying activities. Why, then, should we join the two when talking about the Byzantine text-type and, at the same time, choose one of the two when discussing the earliest copies of the texts, produced in a period when the dogmatic motivations were more intense, and the manuscripts were copied by hopelessly untrained scribes in unknown circumstances?

(4) While we believe that what is called the "Alexandrian Text-type" is the closest to the autograph, we cannot assume that that text-type is a proof for a "relatively pure line of transmission," for different reasons:

- All the so-called text-types are selective designations. I think it is impossible to come to a *strict objective* definition for each of them. There were no schools with different methods of transmitting the text such that we could attribute these text-types to them or to their methodology.[67]
- Being the closest to the original is a relative judgment that does not prove how faithful the text is to the autograph.

67 Klaus Wachtel states that "for terminological and methodological reasons the concept of text-types has become problematic." Wachtel, "Colwell Revisited: Grouping New Testament Manuscripts," in *The New Testament Text in Early Christianity: Proceedings of the Lille Colloquium, July 2000, Histoire du texte biblique 6, 31-43*, Lausanne: Editions du Zèbre, 2003, p.42

- We are not supposed to limit our means of access to the autograph only to the witnessing of the manuscripts; we should, rather, use other means so that we can go as far back as possible to the time of the composition of the New Testament. Use of such means led us to notice a remarkable change in the text in the *obscure zone*.

(5) The only factual example that Wallace repeats in his articles, speeches, and debates is the great agreement[68] between the Codex Vaticanus (B) from the fourth century and P^{75}. First of all, this example cannot prove that that claimed pure line of transmission starts from the time of the copying of the autograph,[69] because P^{75} is a manuscript dated from the third century,[70] and it only contained portions (almost half) of two Gospels (Luke and John). Secondly, this very same example should be taken as evidence against the pure line of transmission claimed by Wallace, because it is *the exception that proves the rule*, and the rule is that the earliest manuscripts differ from the later ones. M. Robinson already indicated that P^{75} is the only known papyrus which is predominantly Alexandrian, all the other papyri possessing a good degree of mixture between different text-types. He insisted that none of the extant papyri beyond 75/B are closely related to any known uncial witness, and that the papyri and uncial manuscripts all appear to reflect isolated and independent lines of transmission.[71] Barbara Aland and Klaus Wachtel proclaimed that it is impossible to establish any direct genealogical ties among the papyri and majuscules because they differ so widely from one another.[72]

68 It is said that it is a "great agreement," even though there are almost two hundred forty disagreements Between P75 and B only in Luke (only fragments from Luke are preserved in P75)! (See the list of disagreements in Gordon Fee's PhD dissertation, *The Significance of Papyrus Bodmer II and Papyrus Bodmer XIV-XV for Methodology in New Testament Textual Criticism*, pp.287-97, unpublished manuscript. University of Southern California, 1966)

69 Even though he insisted that the high agreement between the Codex Vaticanus and P75 prove the antiquity of the readings of the Codex Vaticanus, Calvin L. Porter writes, "While our study demonstrates the antiquity of the majority of readings in Codex Vaticanus, it must be clearly understood that it does not demonstrate their originality." (Calvin L. Porter, "Papyrus Bodmer XV (P75) and the Text of Codex Vaticanus," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (Dec., 1962), p.375).

70 See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 101

71 See Maurice A. Robinson, "The Case for Byzantine Priority," p.560; 571-572

72 Barbara Aland and Klaus Wachtel, "The Greek Minuscule Manuscripts of the New Testament," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research, Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, p.46

Fifth: The Qur'ānic manuscripts so closely resemble one another because the copying was strictly controlled. "All manuscripts ultimately derived from a single copy- a copy that was not identical to the original text." In contrast, the New Testament text was uncontrolled in the process of its copying, and the scribes made scores of mistakes. "In short, the Qur'ān copying practices were more related to apologetics, while the New Testament practices were more related to life."

Answer:
(1) The impeccable transmission of the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf* is a fact that Wallace could not deny,[73] even though he alleges that the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf* is not "identical to the original text," which is an absurd claim. The Qur'ān was not a text with a sole reading prior to the year 25 of the Hegira.[74] A Qur'ānic text does exist with multiple readings that can be traced to the Prophet and which were known to his Companions. The ʿUthmānic text is identical to the original text, but it does not incorporate all of its readings. The consensus of the thousands of Companions who heard the Qur'ān during the life of the Prophet, that the material which was collected by ʿUthmān was *an original text*, is categorical proof that we are dealing with an unaltered Qur'ānic text.
(2) Having an official Qur'ānic copy imposed by the leader of the Muslim Nation in the lifetime of the majority of the Companions of the Prophet, and having a consensus at that early time by these Companions that this text was identical to the original Message revealed to the Prophet, makes the integrity of the text out of question. Conversely, the continual changes made to the New Testament text from the earliest known phase of its transmission have given rise to a most regrettable situation regarding its veracity, which is totally opposite to the certainty that the Qur'an remains pristine. This fact is borne out by the history of the transmission of the Qur'an.
(3) The uncontrolled biblical text allowed the conflicting earlier Christian sects to shape it any way that fit their theological and historical convictions. In contrast, the supervised control of the collected text of the Qur'ān, which text was attested to by the Companions, gave no chance for any corruption of

73 Even a dogmatic missionary like James R. White could not deny the fact that "Uthman's actions led, over time, to a very stable, consistent text for the Qur'an." (*The King James Only Controversy*, p.86)

74 Read about the multiform state of the text of the Qur'an, Yasin Dutton, "Orality, Literacy and the 'Seven Aḥruf' Ḥadīth," in *Journal of Islamic Studies* (2012) 23 (1), pp.1-49

its wording to creep in under the influence of any sectarian schism in the formative period of the Islamic epoch.

Sixth: The New Testament versions and the Greek manuscripts are all "considered the very Word of God." "By way of contrast, the only true Qur'ān is the Arabic Qur'ān. All translations are officially suspect."

Answer:
(1) Honestly, Wallace's point escapes me. Christians (who lost the original text as soon as it was written) give the New Testament versions the same canonical status as the Greek manuscripts (even though it is very well known that the other languages lack many linguistic features unique to Greek, as discussed earlier). Muslims, on the other hand, believe that the word of God was sent to Muḥammad (peace be upon him) in Arabic, which has been in their possession throughout all their history. Where is the problem with the Qur'ān?!
(2) When we read Wallace's statement that "all translations are officially suspect," it seems that a critical view of this kind is due to the distortions found in such translations and based on dogmatic or apologetics concerns. The fact of the matter is, no Muslim scholar would dare give such a judgment. Muslim scholars criticize the accuracy of Qur'ānic translations because they do not convey the exact meaning of the Arabic text, or because they cannot provide all the possible nuances it contains. It is for this reason that the majority of Muslim scholars today do not describe the rendition of the Qur'ān in other languages as the "translation of the Qur'ān"; rather, they insist on calling it the "translation of the meanings of the Qur'ān." [75]
(3) The New Testament scholars are in need of old versions of the texts to help them decide on the best reading available from the wild variants in the manuscripts, while Muslims have faithfully kept to the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf* from the beginning of the first century of the Hegira until today, and most assuredly do not feel any need to resort to translations of the meanings of the Qur'ān in lieu of the original text.

Seventh: The official editing of the Qur'an and the suppression of any nonconforming manuscripts was motivated by theological doctrines, so the edited Qur'an differs from the autograph in doctrinal matters, while the spontaneous copying of the New Testament is a guarantee of a nonsystematic

75 See Maḥmūd al-ʿAzab, *Ishkālyāt Tarjamāt Mʿānī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Cairo: Nahḍat Maṣr, 2006

alteration of the text for theological motives. Wallace quoted a lengthy statement sent to him by Keith E. Small, in which Small insists that the change of the Qur'ānic text happened too early, while "the changes to the New Testament were gradual, relatively late in the history of transmission, and primarily for liturgical reasons and to improve the style."[76]

Answer:

(1) The doing away with the non-ʿUthmānic manuscripts cannot throw suspicion on the authenticity of the Qur'ānic text as we have it today, because the destroyed variants did not contain contradictory variants; they were either examples of the pronunciation of words in an Arabic idiom other than that of *Quraysh* (the Prophet's tribe), they offered synonyms to the revealed words, or they were expansions on the meaning of the inherited text.[77] The Companions and the subsequent generations did not view the discarding of the other variants as something that took away from the status of the holy inherited text. They punctured/burned[78] their own copies of those variants because they were convinced that the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf* preserved the exact words revealed to the Prophet and did not differ from theirs in any way as regards doctrinal issues.

(2) None of the theological conflicts that emerged in the first century were connected to any reading expunged from the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf*.

(3) Small believes that the pre/ʿUthmānic readings are only available in a few palimpsests and in Islamic literature. He also states that these palimpsests do not show remarkable divergence from that which was preserved in the Islamic tradition, [79] which can be seen in certain details in

76 Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011, p. 39

77 Faḍl Ḥasan ʿAbbās, *Itqān al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*, Amman: Dār al-Furqān, 1997, 2/135-9. All these readings were heard from the lips of the Prophet.

78 Most of the narrations state that ʿUthmān ordered the copies of the Companions to be punctured with holes. Some stated that the order was to burn them. (Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, eds. Ibn Bāz, Muḥammad Fu'ād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, and Muḥib al-Dīne al-Khaṭīb, Beirūt: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1379 A.H., 9/20).The Arabic word "puncture" *kharaqa* differs from "burn" *ḥaraqa* with only one extra dot.

79 "It is significant that these larger variant portions found only in the palimpsests match the kinds of variants that are reported in some of the literature and traditions concerning the collection of the Qur'ān. It is also significant that the exact variants they contain are greater in number and extent that what is reported in that literature to have once existed. The suggestion was made by Fischer in the 1940s that the variants in the Islamic records were pious fictions. Though there is a degree of invention in the accounts of variants (as has been ably demonstrated by Rippin), the testimony of the palimpsests, and

the study made on DAM 01–27.1, the only true pre-ʿUthmānic manuscript.[80] The question of the few alleged signs of theological differences will be discussed later on.

(4) Some amateur missionaries are trying to wrongfully use the palimpsest DAM 01–27.1[81] to prove that the Qur'ān as we have today is corrupted, without having *any substantial knowledge* about the Islamic version of the history of the Qur'ān, the dating of this palimpsest, or the academic studies made about it.

My stance is as follows:

I: Both external and internal evidence prove that the inferior text of this palimpsest was written prior to the making of the ʿUthmānic version because (a) the radiocarbon test testifies to that early date, (b) it has many readings known in Islamic literature as belonging to the Companions'

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especially the Fogg palimpsest that contains a variant that is also attributed to Ibn Mas'ud, should instead be viewed as containing authentic memory of such variants, and also that the phenomenon was likely much more extensive and diverse than what has been preserved in the secondary records or extant manuscripts." (Small, *Textual Criticism*, p.84)

80 Behnam Sadeghi defended the pre-ʿUthmānic dating of the palimpsest DAM 01–27.1 based on radiocarbon dating examination (See B. Sadeghi and U. Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qurʾān of the Prophet," in *Arabica*, 2010, Volume 57, p.353). He, with M. Goudarzi, then transcribed the inferior text of the palimpsest (See B. Sadeghi and M. Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," in *Der Islam*, Volume 87, Issue 1-2, pp.1-129) I am grateful to Sadeghi for making his newest article available to me. My (short) study of the palimpsest would not have been possible without the transcribed text given in his article with its helpful notes and comments. I hope that Sadeghi's coming studies will shed more light on the text and give deeper insight on it.

81 In the beginning, missionary claims were based on an *Atlantic* Monthly's article (What is the Koran?, January, 1999) which stated that the manuscripts found in Sana'a in the nineteen seventies revealed an unusual Qur'ān which proved that the text of the Qur'ān is corrupted. Nothing similar followed that article, even Gerd Puin who was the source of such a provocative claim acknowledged that the manuscripts of Sana'a do not counter the Islamic view of the text of the Qur'ān. Other scholars, such as Gregor Schoeler, admit that fact as well. (See, the facsimiles of the letters written by Gerd Puin and Gregor Schoeler to the Yemeni Judge al-Akwaʿ avowing this: Ghassān Ḥamdūn, *Kitāb Allāh fī Iʿjāzihi Yatajallā: wa-rudūd ʿalā aḥdath al-ghārāt al-mustahdifah iʿjāz al-Qur'ān*, Sana'a: Markaz 'Abbādī lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 2002, pp, 102-05; 109-10; M. M. al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'ānic Text*, p.12). Even Small, who worked on some copies of the manuscripts found in Sana'a, admits that the ʿUthmānic text was transmitted faithfully. It is enough to say that no scholarly work was published through past decades that claims that the text of the Qur'ān found in Sana'a discredits the integrity of the standard text. The pseudo-scholarly missionaries' propaganda could not find a way of attacking the text of the Qur'ān except through the text of the palimpsest, which is the only pre-ʿUthmānic copy found in Sana'a. That is why we will tackle only the issue of this manuscript.

codices,[82] (c) the arrangement of the *sūrah*-s [chapters] is close to Ubayy's codices and differs from the ʿUthmānic arrangement.[83]

II: There are only two studies made on the *history* of the inferior text,[84] the first by Behnam Sadeghi in two articles.[85] Sadeghi defended the view that this text belongs to a codex of a Companion of the Prophet, stating that some of the defective character of the text can be explained by the orality of its transmission.[86] The second study was made by Asma Hilali. Unfortunately, her detailed study has not been published yet, but one can see from one of her articles and her lectures[87] that she is of the view that this palimpsest "is not a codex of the Qur'ānic text but a school book dedicated to help the memory of the student learning the Qur'ān.[88]"[89] Even though it is not easy to tell categorically which one of these two views reflects historical fact, it is clear that they share a crucial fact, which is that the "non-standard" readings are (entirely or partly) due to the defective memorization of the text.[90]

III: We can confine the two previous theories in one: the inferior text of the palimpsest is a training copy of a codex that goes back to a Companion. It is a training copy because:

82 See the list of these readings in Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣanʿā' 1," pp.116-22

83 Ibid, p.24

84 Two other scholars studied the inferior text of the palimpsest, but their studies are not helpful in tracing the history of the text. Elisabeth Puin's articles are not concerned about the history of the text (See INÂRAH volumes, 3,4,5), and Alba Fedeli's article was limited to only two folios of the manuscripts (See A. Fedeli, "Early Evidences of Variant Readings in Qur'ānic Manuscripts," in K-H. Ohlig and G-R. Puin, eds. *Die Dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen Zur Entstehung Und Frühen Geschichte Des Islam*, Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2005, pp.293-316).

85 B. Sadeghi promised to publish more studies about the same manuscript ("Ṣanʿā' 1 ," p.2)

86 Islamically, there is no way to treat the non-standard readings in the palimpsest as qur'ānic, mainly because they did not reach us through sound chains of narrators.

87 And personal contact through e-mails.

88 From Hilali's page in the Institute of Ismaili Studies official webpage. http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_person.asp?ID=201&type=auth (12/21/2011)

89 For Christians, P10 (4th century- New Testament fragment: Romans 1:1-7 – A representative of the Alexandrian text-type) has been labeled a writing exercise, and it clearly betrays an inexperienced hand. (Dirk Jongkind, "The Text of the Pauline Corpus," in Stephen Westerholm, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, Malden, MA, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, p.218)

90 Sadeghi and Goudarzi write, "the variants in C-1[our palimpsest] and other Companion codices richly display the phenomena of assimilation of parallels – whereby a scribe's writing of a verse is affected by his or her memory of a similar verse elsewhere in the Qur'ān – and assimilation of nearby terms, whereby a scribe's writing is influenced by nearby expressions." (Ṣanʿā' 1, p.20)

(1) Many of the nonstandard readings can be said to be the result of a faulty memory. Some of the readings are obviously present in the text due to a flawed memory, such as:

a. Q 24:26[91], where the palimpsest (folio 11 A) broke the analogy of mentioning vile woman/man, vile man/woman- good woman/man, good man/woman. It has vile woman/man, vile man/woman, good man/woman, woman/man.

   Q 24:31: the palimpsest has *azwājuhinna* instead of the first *buʿūlatihinna* in the standard reading, but then it uses again the word *buʿūlatihinna* as the standard reading in the rest of the verse. It is odd to use two synonyms in the same verse in a legislative passage without having a contextual reason for doing so.

   Q 2:220: "*fa'ikhwānuhum,*" instead of "*fa'ikhwānukum,*" as is the standard reading, does not fit the context because the speech is made direct from the Prophet to the believers.

   Q 15:65: has *ya'murūna* instead of the standard *tu'marūna,* which does not fit the context, because Lot and his family were supposed to go where Allah asked them to go so they could be saved, not where they wanted to go.

   Q 33:60: The palimpsest has *al-munāfiqīn,* which is grammatically incorrect. It should be *al-munāfiqūn,* as per the standard reading.

   Q 8:73: The palimpsest has *wa-fasādan kabīrun,* which is grammatically incorrect. It should be as is the standard reading: *wa-fasādun kabīrun.*

   Q 24:31: The palimpsest has *abṣārihim* (their gaze) attributed to the males, which is wrong in this context, since the commandment was being addressed to females. It should be *abṣārihinna,* as per the standard reading.

   Q 15:42: The palimpsest has *minhum,* which makes the sentence awkward, or *ʿalayhim,* which would be a scribal error, since *ʿalayhim* appears again after *laka.*

b. Sometimes the scribe made a mistake when he was trying to remember the text, so he put in a synonym for the standard

91 "Vile women are for vile men, and vile men for vile women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women…"

reading, then he erased what he wrote, and finally wrote the traditional reading. For instance, Q. 9:20[92]; 19:8[93]; Q 24:31[94]. This habit is repeated in different cases, which tells that the scribe was not a trained one and was depending on his sloppy memory.

c. In Q 24:31 the scribe wrote "الو" "*al-wi.*" Then, when he found out that the original word, which means "young children," was not "الولدان" "*al-wildān,*" but rather, "الطفل" "*al-ṭifl,*" as per the standard reading, he kept "الو" and then wrote "الطفل", which is unheard of when writing a holy text.

d. Some clauses are transposed to different verses due to their parallel context, such as Q 2:88 *bal ṭabaʿa allāhu ʿalayhā* taken from Q:155; Q:25:2 *lam yīattakhidh ṣāḥibatan walā waladan* taken from Q: 72:3; Q:63:3 *thummā izdādū kufran* taken from Q 3:90.

e. The ninth *sūrah* is the **only** *sūrah* in the Qur'an which does not start with the phrase *bismillāh* . . . "In the name of Allah. . . ." The palimpsest placed this phrase at the beginning of the *sūrah*, but in the next line the scribe wrote, "**Do not say *Bismillāh,***"[95] which shows that the scribe is not professional and is not making an official copy of the Qur'an to be used by other people.

(2) There are some scribal errors in the text, though not many:

- Q 2:196: *fadiyatun* instead of *fafidyatun*.
- Q 2:200: *wa'ithā aqḍaytum* instead of *fa'ithā qaḍaytum.*
- Q 2: 202: *kasabūn* instead of *kasabū*.
- Q 2:217: *istaṭāʿūna* instead of *istaṭāʿū*.
- Q 19:26: *fakālī* instead of *fakulī*.
- Q 22:31: *tahūn* instead of *tahwī*.
- Q 22:37: *wa-laka* instead of *wa-lākin*.
- Q 9:81: *al-nāru jahannama* instead of *nāru jahannama.*

92 See Ṣan'ā' 1, p.56

93 Ibid., p.63

94 Ibid., p.92

95 Hilali provided a copy of the fragment of the palimpsest where we can see clearly this text. See "Hilali, Le palimpseste de Ṣanʿā' et la canonisation du Coran: nouveaux éléments," in *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz*, 21, 2010, p. 445. (I thank Hilali for making her article available to me.) See also Elisabeth Puin, "Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Ṣanʿāʾ - II," in Markus Groß and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, *Vom Koran zum Islam, Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran*, Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2009, p.579

- Q 19:16: *udhkurā* instead of *udhkur*.
- Q19:72: *al-muttaqūna* instead of *al-muttaqīna.*[96]

(3) The number of words written on each line of the palimpsest is not consistent; sometimes there is only one word on a line, while other lines contain over ten words. Using such expensive pieces of parchment to write a holy text in such an unaesthetic way is worthy of notice.

IV: The inferior text can in no way throw doubt on the integrity of the ʿUthmānic recension as we have it, because the ʿUthmānic version[97] has its own perfect lineage, attested to by innumerable chains of narrators and by all the other extant manuscripts. According to Hilali, the text of the palimpsest has no historical reliability to compete with the ʿUthmānic text because it is only a bad copy of it.

V: The text of the palimpsest should actually be used to prove the integrity of the Islamic version of the pre-ʿUthmānic state of the Qur'ānic readings, and to refute many claims of some important non-Muslim orientalists:

(1) The types of variants: It was noted that the differences between the multiple readings in the time of the Companions before issuing a unified text in the time of ʿUthmān, as regards the undotted consonantal skeletal form of the text, are (i) Differences involving the change, addition, or omission of one or two consonants to the skeletal text, with only a minimal effect on the meaning. (ii) Differences involving the substitution of one word for another, usually with the same meaning (i.e. synonyms). (iii) Differences involving the omission or addition of words. (iv) Differences involving a change of word order. (v) Differences involving the substitution of a longer phrase or formula, for another.[98] Many non-Muslim orientalists throw doubt on the authenticity of these details as conveyed to us by Islamic literature, and some of them, such as John Wansbrough and John Burton, go further to negate the historicity of all of this material.[99] Today, for the first time, we have a concrete example to prove the historicity of all the previous details. The text of the palimpsest proves the faithfulness of the Islamic literature and refutes any further kinds of supposed readings.

96 The standard reading is *al-ladhīna ittaqaw*.

97 The comparison is on the level of the unvoweled text, because the inferior text of the palimpsest is written in such way that it is the same form of the original ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf*.

98 Yasin Dutton, "Orality, Literacy and the 'Seven Aḥruf' Ḥadīth," pp. 8-12

99 See John Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies*, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004, pp.44-5; John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p.228

(2) Many non-Muslim scholars—and even a number of Muslim scholars—have doubted that *many* readings ascribed to the Companions were Qur'ānic in the literal sense. They insist that these reported texts are supposed to be considered "*exegetical readings*," which means that they are not Qur'ān in the strict sense, they are only self-interpretations of the Qur'ānic text. In the majority of the reports attributed to the students of the Companions, we cannot see any sign that these students thought that the readings of their teachers were not Qur'ānic text. Most of the time these reporters made it clear that such and such readings were found in "the reading of" a certain Companion or in his *muṣḥaf*.[100] Mujāhid b. Jabr (21-104 A.D.), one of the earliest Qur'ānic scholars who was a student of the Companion Ibn ʿAbbas, said (as al-Tirmidhī narrated with a sound chain of narrators), "If I did recite Qur'ān as the reading of Ibn Masʿūd, I would not need to question Ibn ʿAbbās concerning the exegesis of many of the Qur'ānic passages that I did ask him about them."[101] Thus, many readings ascribed to the Companions were literally part of the Qur'ānic text, and not personal notes. In the text of the palimpsest, we can notice on different occasions such Qur'ānic texts, with additions of words that make the meaning more clear or detailed. Some of them are already mentioned in Islamic literature. So, the palimpsest affirms the credibility of what was narrated about the codices of the Companions.

(3) While many non-Muslim scholars claim that the largest number of the non-canonized readings are a mere forgery by early Muslim generations, Muslim scholars made a claim which is diametrically opposed to that, which is, as stated by ibn al-Jazarī, "The famous readings today from the seven, the ten, and the thirteen comparing to what was famous in the early time are little from many and drops from a sea, and anyone who has a good knowledge, is very well aware of that."[102] ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb, in his book of Qur'ānic readings, which is considered today as the largest collection, acknowledged in the introduction that "you will never find a book that contains all the

100 e.g. in *Tafsīr al-Tabarī*, the readings of Ibn Masʿūd:, Q.2: 213; Q. 4: 34; Q.43:58…

101 Al-Tirmidhi, *al-Jāmiʿ*, *ḥadīth* no: 3208: "لو كنت قرأت قراءة ابن مسعود لم أحتج إلى أن أسأل ابن عباس عن كثير من القرآن مما سألت."

102 Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 1/33 : "القراءات المشهورة اليوم عن السبعة والعشرة والثلاثة عشر بالنسبة إلى ما كان مشهورًا في الأعصار الأول قل من كثر ونزر من بحر؛ فإنّ من له اطلاع على ذلك يعرف علمه علم اليقين"

readings."[103] Ibn Jinnī (d. 392 A.D.) long ago explained the reason for this when he mentioned that no book was written to collect the non-"canonized"[104] readings.[105] If we consider the inferior text of the palimpsest to be a faithful copy of a Companion[106], it will prove that Muslim scholars were right, because we can find new readings in the palimpsest not mentioned in Islamic literature.

(4) The arrangements of the verses: Some scholars claimed that the arrangement of the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf* is a late fabrication, mainly because many verses were added to the text recently, or because the Prophet did not organize these verses in his lifetime. Our palimpsest buries this unfounded claim today because it gives us the same ʿUthmānic arrangement of the verses.

(5) The arrangement of the *sūrah*-s: The Islamic literature noted different arrangements of the *sūrah*-s before unifying the Muslim nation around the ʿUthamanic *muṣḥaf*. The palimpsest gave us a positive sign for the claim of the Islamic tradition.

I would like to finish by quoting Angelika Neuwirth, Professor at the Freie Universität Berlin and Member in the School of Historical Studies, a leading scholar of the Qur'ān in the West today: "New findings of Qur'ānic text fragments, moreover, can be adduced to affirm rather than call into question the traditional picture of the Qur'ān as an early fixed text composed of the suras we have. Nor have scholars trying to deconstruct that image through linguistic arguments succeeded in seriously discrediting the genuineness of the Qur'ān as we know it."[107]

103 ʿAbd al-laṭīf al-Khaṭīb, *Muʿjam al-Qirā'āt*, Damascus: Dār Sa'd al-Dīn, 2002, 1/24

104 The "non-canonized" reading can be an authentic reading too, because the early Muslim scholars were interested in preserving part of the authentic readings, not all of them.

105 Ibn Jinnī, *al-Muḥtasab fī Tabyīn Wūjūh Shawādh al-Qirā'āt wa-al-'īḍāḥi ʿanhā*, ed. ʿAlī al-Najdī Nāyif, ʿAbd al- Ḥalīm al-Najjār, and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Shalabī, Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmyya, 1994, pp.33-4

106 The author of *The Science of Readings in Yemen from the Early Islam till the Eighth Century of the Hegira* stated that many readings of the companions were famous in Yemen before receiving the ʿUthmānic *Muṣḥaf*, on the top of them: ʿAlī b. abī Ṭālib, Muʿādh b. Jabal, Ubayy b. Kaʿb, and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī. (see, ʿAbd Allāh ʿUthmān Alī al-Manṣūr, *ʿIlm al-Qirā'āt fī al-Yemen min Ṣadr al-Islām ilā al-Qarn al-Thāmin al-Hijrī*, Sanʿā: Jāmiʿat Sanaʿā', 2004, p.145)

107 Angelika Neuwirth, "Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed. *Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.100

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Finally, Wallace asserts that while Muslims claim that the manuscripts of the Qur'an are exactly alike, no bona fide Christian scholar has claimed that about their manuscripts.

In fact, Muslim *scholars* do not claim that all copies are 100% alike; what they believe is that the extant Qur'ānic manuscripts were not intentionally corrupted, since all that can be detected is a minute number of accidental mistakes, not one of which one can be found repeated in the other copies. It is, as admitted by Wallace, a perfect written transmission of the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf*, which is a well-done Qur'ānic compilation performed by the followers of the Prophet. As for the New Testament, *no two manuscripts of it are identical.*

Ten Shocking Facts

The following comparison may make it easier for the reader to grasp the fundamental differences between the Qur'ān and the New Testament texts.

Qur'ān	New Testament
1.It was recited by Muḥammad, as the overwhelming majority of non-Muslim scholars believe.[108]	A majority of academic scholars admit that most of the New Testament books were written by unknown authors. There is near-unanimity that the authors of the four Gospels are unknown.
2.It was memorized and transmitted orally from the first Muslim generation until today.	No oral preservation of the text exists.
3.We have manuscripts from the first century of the Hegira that cover the whole text.	No manuscript from the first century exists today.
4.Muslims from the first century after the Qur'ān was revealed used to read the whole text periodically as was	We have no idea about the attitude of the Christians toward the New Testament in the first century. And there is strong

108 Those who believe that the Qur'ān was written by later Muslim generations are a very tiny number of non-Muslim orientalists.

commanded by their Prophet, and they listened to the recitation of its whole text at least once a year in the month of *Ramaḍān*. Children were taught to memorize it at the beginning of their academic career.	evidence that the New Testament's books were not collected in one authoritative book in that century.
5.The official copy was agreed upon and established in the era of the Companions of the Prophet.	The Gospels were written by unknown authors. There is no historical proof to prove that the disciples knew these books.
6.The official copy was approved by thousands of the Companions; many of them accepted the official version (which differed from theirs) because they saw the need for a unified copy that preserved the original text.	There is no official copy.
7.The sectarian schism in the first centuries did not result in the emergence of different Qur'ān-s, even though some of the conflicts were bloody.	Sectarian schism was the main reason for the creation of huge number of books which claim that they are the word of God, or to which the new sects attribute a divine source.
8.Muslims have their Holy book in its original language.	Jesus spoke Aramaic (or maybe Hebrew), but the New Testament books were written in Greek, a language most likely not known to Jesus.
9.We have even the smallest details of the history of the Qur'an.	The first hundred years after the writing of the autographs is an *obscure zone*.
10.There does not exist any dogmatic issue behind the variants as reported by the Companions.	Dogmatic was behind putting part of the oral tradition into written form and also the emergence of what later were called

"canonical" and "non-canonical" writings.
Later on, dogmatism was behind the corruption of some passages of the canonical books.

Small's Delusion

In an unprecedented attempt to discredit the originality of the text of the Qur'ān and to defend the faithfulness of the transmission of the New Testament text through the examination of the extant manuscripts, Keith **E**. Small, an active missionary, discussed his Ph.D thesis, a comparative study of the textual history of the Qur'ān and the New Testament. Before publishing his dissertation, he published an abstract of it[109], then expanded it in his missionary book, *Holy books Have a History, Textual Histories of the New Testament and the Quran*. Shortly after that, he published the scholarly version: "*Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*."

We will comment on Small's publications from three angles: the methodology, the results of his study, and the motivation, so we can discern better the starting point of Small's thesis, his methodology, and his conclusion.

Awkward Methodology

In a Ph.D dissertation written by a researcher involved in Islamic studies, and in a pioneering study in a virgin field in a time when there is a revolution of knowledge and information in the field of scriptural studies of the religious books, one would expect to find that the author had done serious and fruitful research. Unfortunately, the reader of Small's study will be stunned by the highly awkward methodology, which affected the core conclusions of the study. Some of the aspects of this poorly thought out methodology are as follows:

- At the beginning of his book and under the title "Limitations of the Study," Small admits that he dismissed consideration of the Islamic tradition from his study, and that he gleaned the little information that he did include from secondary sources. At the same time, he acknowledges

109 Keith E. Small "Textual Variants in the New Testament and Qur'ānic Manuscript Traditions," in Markus Groß and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds. *Schlaglichter*, Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2008, pp.572-93

that the history of the Qur'ānic text is oral *par excellence*.[110] In such a special case, how can the history of the Qur'ān be drawn when the main source that can enlighten the first centuries of the text is almost absent. What Small did was to use a secondary tool to build a complete theory with minute details. This is a severe deficiency and an indication of a lack of seriousness.

- The fundamental problem with Small's methodology is that it starts from an unfounded premise and the unscientific wish to prove the superiority of the New Testament text compared to the Qur'ānic text on the scale of the manuscriptural evidence. Small was trying to legitimize this comparison by stating that the Qur'ān is, like the New Testament, a sacred book of a major faith community, and that it also has an extensive number of available manuscripts.[111] This is a tenuous and inept justification for such a study, because these two books cannot be compared in this way, due to the intrinsic differences in their transmission. The New Testament has no oral tradition whatsoever that might have been inherited from the earliest centuries; its entire history can only be examined through extant manuscripts, while the Qur'ān was transmitted through unbroken oral chains, and its manuscripts were not used as a means for the preservation of the text, by themselves.

The *muṣḥaf* was not the means to preserve the Qur'ān for the Muslim nation throughout its history; it was the oral memory which kept the text intact as it is. The Qur'ānic manuscripts were not treated as authorities by their owners or even by the scribes, they were merely considered as a way to help with reading and memorizing the text and to spread the fresh and steady oral tradition. The practical rule imposed from the first century concerning the transmission of the Qur'ān is, "**do not take the Qur'ān from *muṣḥafiīī*** (someone who did not receive the Qur'ān from a teacher but from a written copy).[112]

110 "The Qur'ān texts were written in a script conveying imprecise grammatical and syntactical meaning and phonetics, functioning more as an aid to memory in reciting already known texts than as a vehicle for recording and preserving written literature." (Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p.162)

111 Ibid., p. vii

112 Al-Sakhāwī, *Fatḥ al-Mughīth bi-Sharḥi Alfiyyati al-Ḥadīth*, ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Khuḍīr and Muḥammad Al Fhayad, Riyadh: Maktabat Dār al-Minhāj, 1426 A.H., 3/152

- What will really astonish the reader is that the main conclusions of Small's study have nothing to do with the textual study he made on the Qur'ānic manuscripts. The crucial points he made are connected to the pre-ʿUthmānic readings and the readings chosen by Ibn Mujāhid in the fourth century A.H. The pre-ʿUthmānic readings are only available in Islamic traditional books, and that they exist in very few palimpsests is debatable, as will be seen. Anyway, Small did not study these palimpsests in his book.[113] The authentic readings chosen by Ibn Mujāhid cannot be studied either through the extant Qur'ānic manuscripts.
- The blend of contradictory sources used by Small in his discussion is another unpleasant feature of his work. Small was aware that the testimony of the Qur'ānic scriptures could not serve to support the wished-for result, which is why he gathered statements from orientalists' studies to question the pillars of the history of the Qur'ān. One shocking example is his adherence to Bellami's views on the Qur'ānic history, which are based on the dismissal of the trustworthy Islamic tradition. Small, one will note, did not express an unusual doubt about the same tradition compared to the majority of the orientalists.
- What makes Small's conclusions unacceptable is that many of his deductions are not backed up by detailed argumentation or evidence. In many instances, Small found it enough to allude to studies that made provocative statements, without supplying any related decisive arguments that would refute the common views held by scholars. Moreover, sometimes the reference used does not make clear what Small claims to be defending. For instance, when he claimed that Ibn Mujāhid's choosing of the "canonical" readings was made to support particular Sunni orthodox political and theological positions,[114] he alludes to an article[115] written by a specialist in Medieval Islamic architecture[116] who neither discussed the motivations of Ibn Mujāhid's actions nor mentioned these "particular Sunni orthodox political and theological positions."

113 I do believe that 01-27.1 (the inferior text) has pre-ʿUthmānic readings.

114 See Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p. 101

115 Yasser Tabbaa, "Canonicity and Control: The Sociopolitical Underpinnings of Ibn Muqla's Reform," in *Ars Orientalis*, 1999, pp.91-100

116 Yasser Tabbaa

- Due to his unfamiliarity with Arabic classic Islamic literature and his seeming haste to portray Muslim scholars as distorters of the true history of the Qur'an, Small misrepresented many statements made by these scholars. He writes, for instance, that al-Bāqillānī (d. 403 A.H.) "inadvertently made this kind of mistake in that he claimed that within Muḥammad's lifetime, the complete arrangement of the text of the Qur'an was fixed, including the precise vowels and consonantal readings of the text." [117] He commented, "view of the extant manuscript evidence, this appears to be anachronistic, in that the precise vowels and readings could not have been preserved in the script of the seventh century."[118] He referred at the endnote to "Madigan, *Self-Image*, p.47." Madigan provided the Arabic quotation and its English translation, yet Small distorted his statement. Al-Bāqillāni was not talking about the manuscripts, he was only talking about the oral transmission of the Qur'an, and when he discussed the arrangement of the *sūrah*-s, he said that there were two different scholarly views: the first, that the Prophet himself arranged the *sūrah*-s, and the other, that this was not the case. Al-Bāqillānī felt that the second view was more plausible, but Small wrongly attributed to him the first view.
- It is quite clear that Small's knowledge of the science of readings is extremely poor, and one can only wonder *how he was authorized to write his thesis in such a field*. His work contains numerous shocking errors, but due to the lack of space, I will cite only three of them:
    — Small writes, "Jeffery notes that at least fifty systems for reciting the Qur'ān were still known after the canonization of the Ten in the tenth/fourth century."[119] Small made here two statements that expose his ignorance about Qur'ānic studies: first, the so-called canonization of the Ten occurred in the ninth century (by Ibn al-Jazarī), not the fourth century. (He evidently confused here the so-called canonization of the Ten with the so-called canonization of the Seven.) Second, as a scholar, he should not have referred to Jeffery as having noted that there were fifty readings known in the fourth century, because that was not something discovered by Jeffery; it

117 Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p. 143
118 Ibid., pp.143-4
119 Ibid., p. 145

was already the subject of a famous book by al-Hudhalī (403?-465 A.D.) *al-Kāmil fī al-Qirā'āt al-ʿashr wa al-arbaʿīne al-zā'ida ʿalayhā.*[120] Small's documentation of such a well-known fact with an odd allusion is a clear proof of his total unfamiliarity with the scholarly books on Qur'ānic studies. Jeffery alluded to the book of al-Hudhalī, but Small did not find it appropriate to allude directly to the same book, probably because Jeffery noted that al-Hudhalī's book is "lost,"[121] so Small did not dare mention it, and he put the burden of the allusion on Jeffery. However, it is known by scholars that that book was not lost; *al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah* in Egypt has a manuscript of it under number 369,[122] and the book was edited and printed before the publishing of Small's books.[123]

— It is surprising that, when Small was alluding to the number of the early readings, he did not refer directly to *al-Nashr*, one of the prime sources for Qur'ānic studies, if not the first one, with *al-Sabʿah* of Ibn Mujāhid. Small used two intermediaries through whom he referred to this essential and famous book.[124]

— More appalling than the two previous examples is the fact that Small does not even know how to spell the name of the central, key figure of the readings studies; Small wrote the name of this person throughout his book as "Ibn Mujāḥid," which is "ابن مجاحد" in Arabic, and his name is spelled "ابن مجاهد" with "هـ" "h," and not "ح" "ḥ."[125]

- While Small's inability to read Arabic was evidently the main reason he did not use Arabic references in his book about the "Arabic" Qur'ān(!), Small did not abstain from discussing linguistic themes to prove his negative view of the Qur'ānic manuscripts. He made egregious

120 Lit. "The fullness in the ten readings and the added forty"

121 Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*, Leiden: Brill 1937, p.2

122 Copies of this manuscript are available in other libraries, such as the copy of Dār al-Kutub al-Misryyah, no: 1ق – 134ق.

123 See al- Hudhalī, *al-Kāmil fi al-Qirā'āt al-ʿashr wa al-arbaʿīne al-zā'ida ʿalayhā*, ed. Jamāl al-Shāyib, Mu'assasat Samā, 2007

124 Keith E. Small, *Holy Books Have a History, Textual Histories of the New Testament and the Qur'ān*, p. 104

125 See the "Arabic Transliteration System" used by Small in his book, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p.xv

mistakes as he was trying to make it appear that obvious scribal errors were variant readings. He writes, for instance, that the "الكبر" *al-kibr* with an extra tooth "الكبير" *al-kabīr*, as is written in the manuscript 01-29.1; Q. 14:39, means "very old age" in plural form.[126] To make it worse, he alluded in the endnote to Dictionaries that do not contain any such incorrect translations. The word *al-kabīr* has nothing to do with the claimed plural form; it means mainly "the big or old," in singular. The whole sentence with the form *al-kabīr* is not an acceptable Arabic construction.

- Small did not bother to check the reliability of the statements in the references he quoted, even when they contained apparent mistakes. One odd example of this is his statement that Mingana noted one instance of an omitted word in a palimpsest.[127] Small then referred, in the endnote, to the item meant by Mingana.[128] Surprisingly, Small included Alba Fedeli's article that dealt with Mingana's claim in the list of references of his book. In that article, Fedeli commented on Mingana's claim in this way: "We can read the standard text with *Kāffat^an^* repeated twice (9:36)"[129], which means that Mingana was lying about the unusual reading he noticed in the palimpsest.[130]
- Small's preposterous claim that "There are records of transmission lines of recitations documented with reading certificates, but these also do not document the precise content of the recitation"[131] shows that he is totally ignorant about the history of the Qur'ān and how the readings were transmitted. Scholars who were writing down their certifications used to teach thousands of students these same readings, and these readings were transmitted by so many thousands of scholars in their time that it would be meaningless to document their content.

126 See Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p.78

127 Ibid., p. 67

128 Alphonse Mingana and Agnes Smith Lewis, *Leaves from Three Ancient Qur'āns Possibly Pre-'Uthmānic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914, p. xl, item C.

129 A. Fedeli, "Mingana and the Manuscript of Mrs. Agnes Smith Lewis, One Century Later," in *Manuscripta Orientalia*, 2005, Volume 11, No: 3, p.7

130 Mingana, a former priest and one of the well known authors who was deeply committed to distorting the image of Islam in academic circles, is well known for practicing forgery. (He even taught a priest how to make vellum look older than its actual age.) Ibid., p.4

131 Keith E. Small, *Holy Books Have a History*, p.105

Small's Objections

Small declared many times that the consonantal form of the text attributed to ʿUthmān was preserved faithfully from the time of its compilation to the present day,[132] but he puts a twofold problem before the reader. He surmises that:

• Since Muslims acknowledge that the text compiled by ʿUthmān does not contain all of the readings transmitted by Muḥammad to his Companions, that automatically means that we cannot access the whole of the original text of the Qur'ān due to the disappearance of part of the original consonantal text.

• The consonantal text compiled in the time of ʿUthmān was void of diacritical marks, and due to the weakness[133] of the oral tradition accompanying it from the beginning, we cannot know how the text was originally pronounced. Small purports that it is better to believe that much of the "canonical readings" were created through an attempt to decipher that silent consonantal text, from the first century.

These two objections could only be "justified" if a researcher conducted his study while intentionally rejecting the Islamic tradition and by failing to use any Islamic books that are at the center of Qur'ānic studies. A study made by an author who has not read the *ḥadīth* tradition or the books of Ibn Mujāhid, or Ibn al-Jazarī or any other influential early Qur'an studies author's writings—due to his unfamiliarity with the Arabic language, as will be seen later—would, of course, be prone to doubt even everyday facts.

A- The ʿUthmānc Recension and the Lost Original Text

Small quoted, and agreed with, L. Bevan Jones' statement made in the beginning of the twentieth century, "But while it may be true that no other work has remained for twelve centuries with so pure a text, it is probably equally true that no other has suffered so drastic a purging."[134]

132 "Concerning the Qur'ān, one written form of the consonantal text has been kept extremely well." (Keith E. Small, *Holy Books have a History*, p.61); "What can be maintained is that one form of the consonantal text has been very well preserved from the seventh/first century" (p.71)

133 "That an oral tradition of the recital of the Qur'ān exists from the earliest period of the text is not contested. What is contested among scholars, both Islamic and Western, is how complete and strong this tradition was to preserve a precise pronunciation of the text as it was received." (Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p.152)

134 L. Bevan Jones, *The People of the Mosque, an Introduction to the Study of Islam with Special Reference to India*, London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1932, p.62

If one wants to discuss the meaning of the term "original text" of the Qur'ān, one needs to have a well founded perception of the status of the "readings" and how the Prophet of Islam used to convey them to his disciples, and how these disciples used to deal with them.

Ibn al-Jazarī alluded to the fact that Muslim scholars had two different views about the whole corpus of the multiple authentic readings, and their reaction about the ʿUthmānic recension. Some of them believe that the seven *aḥruf* which comprise all of the readings, which came from the lips of the Prophet, are all contained in the ʿUthmānic recension, while the others believe that the ʿUthmānic recension kept only part of the legitimate readings.[135]

If we adhere to the first view, we will consider the non-ʿUthmānic readings to be abrogated readings in the lifetime of the Prophet or to be exegetical readings made by some of the Companions. Then, we can say that the consonantal form of the text attributed to ʿUthmān contains the whole corpus of the original text.

If we uphold the second view, which is favored by the majority of Muslim scholars, then we need to look at the purpose of having different readings for the same text during the Prophet's lifetime, so we can find out their true status in the earliest Islamic era. We will do this forthwith,

(1) *No* prophetical saying or action stated that the Companions or the Muslim nation had to preserve, or even know all of the authentic readings. From the *ḥadīth*-s that mention the seven *aḥruf,* we can see that these different readings were a *rukhṣa* (concession) given to the Companions in the time of the Prophet, and that the Companions were not asked to memorize all of them. This can be seen, for instance, in the *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim about the time that ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb heard another Companion reading *sūrah al-Furqān* in a different way from his, and took him to the Prophet thinking that that Companion had lied when he told him that he had heard the recitation of the *sūrah* that way directly from the Prophet. The Prophet told ʿUmar that *sūrah al-Furqān* had been revealed as taught to ʿUmar and to the other Companion, and he did not blame on ʿUmar for not learning to recite the same *sūrah* the other way. This is evidence that preserving all readings of the Qur'ān was not a religious obligation. The Prophet further explained to these two Companions in the *ḥadīth* in question

135 See Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 1/31-32

that "The Qur'ān has been revealed in seven different *aḥruf*, so recite whichever one is easy for you."[136] The Prophet stressed this message by declaring that "The Qur'ān was revealed in seven different *aḥruf*, each one of them is remedial[137] and sufficient."[138] Alī b. abī Ṭālib (d.40 A.D.), the Companion and the fourth Caliph, when two of the Companions asked the Prophet about the different ways they read one particular Qur'ānic *sūrah*, said, "the Prophet commands you that each one read the Qur'ān as was taught to him."[139]

Ubayy b. Kaʿb reported that the Prophet encountered *Jibrīl* at the *mirā'* stones (on the outskirts of Madinah, near *Qubā'*) and told him, "I have been sent to a nation of illiterates, among them is the elder with his walking stick, the aged woman and the young." *Jibrīl* replied, "So command them to read the Qur'ān in seven *aḥruf*."[140] Thus the seven multiple *aḥruf* were revealed mainly to make the Qur'ānic text easy for the first Muslim generation, which was illiterate, to understand and recite, not as a compulsory religious inheritance to be kept throughout the Muslim generations.

The Prophet sent his Companions to different areas of the immense land governed by Muslims and ordered them to teach their people how to read the Qur'ān, but he *never* ordered them to convey the text of the Qur'ān in its multiple readings or ways of recitation. To suppose, for the sake of argument, that the Companions were ordered to teach the Muslims of the new lands all the authentic readings would imply that these Companions would have had to know all of the readings. This assumption is not supported by the Islamic tradition. The earliest Islamic tradition sustains the view that the Companions did not, individually, know all the multiple readings conveyed by the Prophet, and that they were content to only know of their existence.

Studying the readings known in the first century in the most important cities to which various Companions had gone as religious guides shows that Muslims of these cities adopted a few different readings. This tells us clearly that the Companions chose to convey one, or only a very few, of the multiple original readings as taught to them by the Prophet.

136 *Al-Bukhāri*, *ḥadīth* no: 2287, Muslim, *ḥadīth* no: 818

137 shāfin= good to heal the ignorants from their ignorance.

138 *Al-Nasā'ī*, *ḥadīth* no: 949

139 Al- Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, *ḥadīth* no: 2940, Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, *ḥadīth* no: 3981

140 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, *ḥadīth* no: 21242

In conclusion, therefore, if it was not mandatory for each one of the Companions to preserve all the readings uttered by the Prophet, the next generations would *not* be asked to do so either, because *fundamental religious duties are not created but inherited*.

(2) It is obvious that none of the Companions thought that keeping only one consonantal text meant losing the original text, *even though the project held by ʿUthmān would do away with the transmission of some of the readings they heard directly from the Prophet.*

The Companions firmly believed that they had to preserve the original text of the Qur'ānic revelation. At the same time, they knew quite well that the multiple readings they were allowed to recite were given to them mainly as *rukhṣa*, and that the fact that there was one or a few different ways of reading did not detract from the fact that they were all reciting the "original text." The term "original text" is more than just a literary concept; it is a religious conception that derives its essence and meaning from the prophetic tradition as acquired and understood by the Companions.

The ʿUthmānic project, and what was done by Christians from the second century when they canonized some books and rejected others, are similar from one angle and different from another. The endeavors are similar in that there was no intention of preserving the whole corpus of the divine sayings, and different as regards the idea of keeping an original text. While the ʿUthmānic recension was a meticulous project to keep an original (consonantal) version of the text, made by with unprecedented care and patience in an open political, cultural, and religious environment, the canonization of the 27 books of the New Testament was made without a discernible methodology and in an indeterminate environment.

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Small, following Gerd Puin[141], tries to throw doubt on the authenticity of the Qur'ānic text by focusing on a few early manuscripts found in Sana'a that are organized differently from the standard Qur'ānic *sūrah-s.*[142]

141 See Gerd Puin, "Observations on Early Qur'ān Manuscripts in San'a" in Stefan Wild, ed. *The*

Small's claim can in no way disprove the faithfulness of the transmission of the text of the Qur'ān, for these sound reasons:

First: The *majority* of Muslim scholars advocate the view that the Prophet himself did not organize the *sūrah-s* of the Qur'ān as we see them today, and that the "classic" organization was created by the Companions at the time of working on the ʿUthmānic recension.[143] Thus, the received organization of the *sūrah*-s is a mere consensual arrangement of the available *sūrah*-s and has nothing to do with the text of the "revealed Qur'ān."

Second: These few manuscripts do not represent a historical phenomenon, because the Islamic tradition has always admitted that there were different arrangements in the copies of some of the Companions, such as Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy b. Kaʿb, before the introduction of the ʿUthmānic recension. What is worthy of notice here is that the early manuscripts, which have an atypical arrangement of the *sūrah*-s, are very close to the *muṣḥaf*-s of Ibn Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy b. Kaʿb, such as the pre-ʿUthmānic manuscript 01-27.1 (the inferior text).[144]

Third: Al-Bukhārī narrated the following account on the authority of Youssef b. Māhak. A person from Iraq came and asked, ʿĀisha, […] "O mother of the Believers! Show me [the copy of] your Qur'ān." She said, "Why?" He said, "In order to compile and arrange the Qur'an according to it, for people recite it with its *sūrah*-s not in proper order." ʿĀisha said, "What does it matter which part of it you read first? [Be informed] that the first thing that was revealed thereof was a *sūrah* from *al-Mufaṣṣal*, and in it was mentioned Paradise and the Fire. When the people embraced Islam, the verses regarding legal and illegal things were revealed. If the first thing to be revealed was, "Do not drink alcoholic drinks," people would have said, "We will never leave alcoholic drinks," and if there had been revealed, "Do not commit illegal sexual intercourse," they would have said, "We will never give up illegal sexual intercourse." […] Then ʿĀisha took out the copy of the Qur'an for the man and dictated to him the verses of the *sūrah*-s (in their proper order)."[145]

Qur'ān as Text, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1996, p.111

142 See Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p. 124

143 See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fi ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*, p.137

144 B. Sadeghi and U. Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet," p. 360

145 *Al-Bukhārī*, *ḥadīth* no: 4707. English tr. from:

http://www.hadithcollection.com/sahihbukhari/94-sahih-bukhari-book-61-virtues-of-the-

Ibn Ḥajar commented on this *ḥadīth* by saying it is evident that Youssef b. Māhak was not born yet [or still an infant] when ʿUthmān sent the new copies of the Qur'ān to the cities of the Islamic state, because al-Mizzī noted that what b. Māhak narrated, on the authority of the Companion Ubayy is *mursal* [it missed an intermediary in the chain of narrators],[146] so we can deduce, as Ibn Ḥajar does, that the request of this Iraqian was made after the Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* was widespread through the Islamic territory with its particular arrangement of the *sūrah*-s. Thus, this *ḥadīth* shows that the Companions were aware that the arrangement of the *sūrah*-s, as imposed by the ʿUthmānic team, was not decreed by the Prophet and that, therefore, changing the arrangement did not affect the integrity of the text. ʿĀisha, the Prophet's wife and one of the leading scholars after the death of the Prophet, did not see in the request of the Iraqi man something that would affect the integrity of the text. The whole project inaugurated by ʿUthmān was based on the principle of *al-maṣāliḥ al-mursala*,[147] i. e. the benefits that *sharia* generally approve and are not sustained by particular textual evidence. The lack of a clear divine commandment was the reason why the Companions did not consider that having a copy of the *muṣḥaf* with a different arrangement of *sūrah*-s broke any religious commandment, or that the arrangement of *sūrah*–s corrupted the word of God. Having one sole arrangement of *sūrah*-s was needed only to make a unified Qur'ānic written text for the growing nation.

So, Small's recognition of the different arrangements of *sūrah*-s in a very few early manuscripts did not bring to light any new facts, because it is known that the copies of the Qur'ān that belonged to the Companions had their own particular arrangements and were circulating in the Islamic cities before the diffusion of the ʿUthmānic copies. It is also known, as mentioned in the Islamic tradition, that imposing the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf,* with its particular arrangement of the *sūrah*-s, took some decades in the vast Islamic land.[148]

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quran/5112-sahih-bukhari-volume-006-book-061-hadith-number-515.html

146 Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 9/39-40

147 See ʿAbd Allāh al-Shinqīṭī, *Nashr al-Bunūd ʿalā Marāqī al-Suʿūd*, Mohammedia: Ṣundūq Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-Islāmī, [n.d.], 2/190

148 Sulaymān al-Aʿmash (61- 148 A.H.) said that (when he was young) he saw that the majority of the people of *al-Kūfah* using the reading of Ibn Masʿūd, and just very few people used to use the ʿUthmānic

B- The Oral Tradition, Inherited or Partly Fabricated

In my view, Small's understanding of the history of the oral tradition of the Qur'ānic readings was presented to us backwards. The question is not, "Was the oral tradition strong enough to reach later generations, because of the defective character of the script used by the earlier generations to write down the text of the Qur'ān (the *ḥijāzī* style)?"

The question would have been better posed thus: "Did the early Muslim generations faithfully preserve the original oral tradition?" All serious researchers realize that such a text could never be read without the help of an oral tradition, so we have to expect an early oral tradition to be tied to the text in its *ḥijāzī* style of script. All serious researchers also know that the ʿUthmānic text was void of diacritical marks, which tells us also that the early Muslim nation believed that the original oral tradition was still extant in a pure state.

To believe that subsequent generations felt the need to create readings on the basis of the defective character of the *ḥijāzī* script cannot be sustained, for various reasons:

First: The ten authentic readings were collected and transmitted starting from the dawn of Islamic history, which totally rules out the possibility of any gap between the generation of the Companions and the ten readings.

Reader	Birth[149]	Head of the Readers in:
1-Nāfiʿ	70 A.H.	Madīnah
2-Ibn Kathīr	45 A.H.	Mecca
3-Abū ʿAmr	68 A.H.	Baṣrah
4-Ibn ʿĀmir	21 A.H.	Damascus
5-ʿĀṣim	?- Died 127 A.H.	Kūfah

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muṣḥaf (Ibn Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-Sabʿa fi al-Qirā'āt*, Cairo: Dar Almaʿārif, [n.d.], p.67).

149 I am giving the dates of births because it is agreed that these scholars learned these readings at an early age, because the Qur'ān was the first thing that they were taught, as was every young Muslim at that time. Also, many of them started teaching their recitation early on. Nāfiʿ, for instance, was promulgating his recitation(s) for almost seven decades. (Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāya fi ḍbaqāt al-Qurrā'*, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyyah, 2006, 2/290-91). So that it would appear that these readers lived at a different period than the prophet's era, Small incorrectly writes that the seven readers chosen by ibn Mujāhid lived in the second century (Small, *Textual*, p.151). The fact of the matter is that all except one of them (al-Kisā'ī is already a student of Ḥamza) were born in the first century, A.H, two in the first half, and that they all received the Qur'ānic readings from an early age, and that they also started teaching the Qur'an, early, as well.

6-Ḥamza	80 A.H.	Kūfah
7-Kisā'ī	119 A.H.	Kūfah
8(1)-Abū Jaʿfar	?-Died 139 A.H.	Madīnah
9(2)-Yaʿkūb	117 A.H.	Baṣrah
10(3)-Khalaf	150 A.H.	Kūfah (transmitter of Ḥamzah)

Ibn Mujāhid made clear the reason that he chose the (first) seven readers by stating that these seven readers were the leading teachers of the readings in the most important Islamic areas: *al-Hījaz*,[150] Iraq, and *al-Shām*, that they were the recipients of the Qur'ānic readings from the second Muslim generation (*attābiʿīn*), and that the Muslims of those areas unanimously agreed that their readings were authentic and accepted them as the special readings of these particular areas.[151]

Second: It is historically unfeasible to believe that such disturbing phenomena happened in the first century without leaving traces of doctrinal and legislative struggles. How can we suppose that the first Muslim generations created altogether new ways of generating holy readings without creating schools and waves of Qur'ānic methodology for deciphering the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf*?

Third: The hypothesis proposed by Small cannot be reconciled with the small number of multiple readings in the ten authentic readings. Ibn Mujāhid listed 703 places where there are different readings among the Seven, 41 of which involve differences in the skeleton of the text. All of this, we should bear in mind, is in the context of a text that numbers some 77,400 words.[152]

Fourth: If the approved readings were really fabricated by scholars because of the weakness of the early oral tradition, then how is it that the skeleton form of thousands of words in the Qur'ān can be pronounced in different ways which fit the context well, while the ten readers read them in a single way?[153]

150 The area that includes the west of present-day Saudi Arabia.

151 Ibn Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-Sabʿa*, p.87

152 Yasin Dutton, "Orality, Literacy and the 'Seven Aḥruf' Ḥadīth," p.10

153 See some examples in ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Shalabī, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf al-ʿUthmānī*, second edition, Jeddah: Dār Al-Shurūq,1983, pp.35-8

Fifth: How can we explain that some words in the Qur'ān were not read by any of the ten readers as they were written, such as "الصلوة", "الزكوة" "سأوريكم"[154], "لأاوضعوا"[155] and "لأاذبحنه"[156]? Is this not a sign that a stronger oral tradition was shaping the sounds of the written words?

Sixth: The Companion Zeid b. Thābit stated, "القراءة سنّة متّبعة" "The readings are a *Sunna* that is strictly adhered to."[157] The readings of the Qur'ān are something to inherit, not to create. This is a historical fact evinced by the Muslim educational methodology from the earliest centuries of transmitting and teaching Qur'ān.

Seventh: A negligible number of scholars, such as ʿIsā b. ʿUmar al-Baṣrī al-Thaqafī, preferred reading some Qur'ānic words in a way that suited their theoretical linguistic preferences, without adhering to a previous oral tradition, and that was the reason the Muslim nation never accepted their readings. [158]

Eighth: Small goes on to claim that some Qur'ānic readings emerged from doctrinal disputes or interests. As he could not find any such phenomenon in the history of Islam, what he did was present a miniscule example of variants to support his irrational claim.

- He mentioned Fedeli's claim that the absence of *ʿan dīnikum* in Q. 2:217 in the Fogg palimpsest is possibly an indication of the construction of the Qur'ānic text to justify that fighting in the holy month of Rajab was permitted to Muslims.[159]

  Behnam Sadeghi refuted Fedeli's allegation by stating, "First, she has missed the unmistakable lowermost part of the *nūn* of *ʿan* which has survived the damage to the parchment. So, *ʿan dīnihi* was part of the text after all. (*ʿan dīnihi* is present also in the Bonhams 2000 folio in Kor 5, 54.) Second, the entire sentence *wa-man yartadid minkum ʿan dīnihi fa-yamut wa-huwa kāfirun* is generally illegible

154 Q. 7: 145 and 21: 37

155 Q. 9: 47

156 Q. 27: 21

157 *Sunan Saʿīd b. Manṣūr*, *ḥadīth* no: 5/67

158 ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Shalabī, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf al-ʿUthmānī*, p.38

159 See Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p. 138; A. Fedeli, "Early Evidences of Variant Readings in Qur'ānic Manuscripts," p. 314

due to damage to the parchment. It is, therefore, not clear how she is able to conclude that the words *ʿan dīnihi* in this verse are missing. Presumably the fact that the lower-modifier wrote *ʿan dīnihi* leads her to think that the words were not there originally; but, as shown above in footnote 12, the lower modifier sometimes wrote words that filled the gaps created by irremediable erasure. It is thus entirely possible that *ʿan dīnihi* was part of the lower text, was erased irremediably, and then was written again by the lower modifier. Third, even if the term were missing here, there would be no reason for considering the ʿUthmānic wording as the later one, as opposed to the earlier one. Her choice in this regard and her assumption of deliberate change betray, perhaps, a slight measure of conspiracy-mindedness. Fourth, the scenario Fedeli constructs to explain what may have motivated the addition of *ʿan dīnihi* is unclear as it stands."[160]

- The manuscript of Sana'a 01-29.1 has *taqūmu* in Q.14:41 instead of the standard reading *yaqūmu.* Small claimed that the Sana'a manuscript has an "un-canonical" reading, which means "When *you* reckon the account" rather than "when *it* is reckoned." He adds, "This makes the invocation more internally consistent and personal between lbrāhīm and Allāh." [161] Actually, this is an impossible reading, as the verse reads,{رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْحِسَابُ}. In order to say, "*you* reckon the account," the word used would be *tuqīmu,* not *taqūmu,* as *taqūmu al-ḥisāba* is very awkward Arabic.
- The Topkapi manuscript has in Q.14:38 *yuʿlinu,* "he revealed" instead of the standard reading *nuʿlinu,* "we reveal," changing the first letter from *nūn* to *yā'*. Small made this comment: "This does fit the overall narrative context and theology of the Qur'ān, though there is an awkward change of person in a direct address, and is possibly a copyist mistake."[162] This is

160 B. Sadeghi and U. Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet," p. 363

161 Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p. 74

162 Ibid.

not "possibly a copyist mistake," it is rather a *clear-cut* copyist mistake, because it is awkward Arabic that has no contextual purpose or motive. Small made his unfounded statement without giving any proof to show that this "variant reading" fits the theology of the Qur'ān. There is no evidence whatsoever to show that the reading that says that Allah is aware of that which Abraham and his family or any of God's creatures are hiding, and what "he(?) Reveal/proclaim" is in accord with Qur'ānic theology. First of all, to whom is the "he" referring? The only possible answer, even though it would be awkward Arabic, would be "Ishmael," so how could this possibly make this sentence a clear Qur'ānic proclamation? Evidently, Small thought that the "He" referred to Allah, as he wrote it with a capital "H." What Small saw is an impossible Arabic construction: the "he" can in no way refer to Allah because the verse starts with *innaka,* "you indeed."

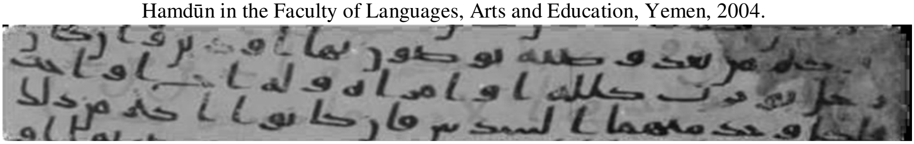
- Small alludes to Powers' provocative book, *Muḥammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: the Making of the Last Prophet*. He said, "Powers examines an intriguing double correction in BNF 328a that perhaps demonstrates corrections for legal and theological reason."[163] Here, he is referring to the reading of the word *kalāla* in Q. 4:12 as *kalla,* which would affect the meaning of the verse "If a man designates a daughter-in-law *kalla* or wife as heir and he has a brother or sister, each one of them is entitled to one-sixth." The meaning in the standard reading is "If a man is inherited by collaterals *kalālat*^an^ or a woman [is inherited by collaterals], and he [or she] has a brother or sister, each one of them is entitled to one-sixth." After personally examining the colored facsimile, I would agree that a later hand did write the word *kalālat*^an^ over the original word, but there is no decisive evidence that the original word in the manuscript was *kalla.* Furthermore, I saw *kalālat*^an^ written with faded ink, the two long original *lam* appearing exactly below the rewritten *lam-s.*

163 Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p. 102

It is worthy of note, too, that the previous and succeeding lines have at least six interventions by a later scribe, and it is obvious that most of the words that were written over were not changed from their initial state, they were just shaded over with more ink. The only case that probably has a different original word is the next word after *kalāla*; it looks like it was *lahā*, "to her," not *lahu*, "to him," which is an obvious scribal mistake due to the fact that in Arabic we cannot allude to a male or a female when they are put together in one context with a female pronoun. The variant imagined by Powers is pure fiction not attested to in any other Qur'ānic manuscript and not known in any oral tradition!

I have no doubt that Powers' book is an interesting piece of literature to read, but as a pure fanciful fiction, devoid of any ties to historical reality.[164]

Below is a reproduction of a portion of a first century manuscript found in Sana'a (DAM 01–27.1) showing the standard *kalāla* (in the second line). The picture is taken from the M.A. thesis of Razān Hamdūn in the Faculty of Languages, Arts and Education, Yemen, 2004.



Ninth: Muslim scholars from the earliest days after the promulgation of the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf* made it clear that the accepted reading does not necessarily have to match the consonantal ʿUthmānic text one hundred percent, as stated in the well-known verse of Ibn al-Jazarī's poem, "وكان للرسم احتمالا يحوي," which means that scholars will forgive the minor differences[165],

164 See Walid A. Saleh, Review, "Muḥammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet, by David S. Powers," in *Comparative Islamic Studies*, (2010) pp.251–64

165 Al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 1/12-3. Al-Suyūṭī writes, "Differences in recitation may agree with the reality of transcription such as "*taʿlamūn*" with the *ta* or *ya* or "*wa-yaghfir lakum*" with the *ya* or *nūn* and so on, which show that the letters were not dotted or annotated, either when omitted or included. This is despite the fact that the Companions were adepts in the science of spelling in particular and had piercing understanding in determining all sciences. See how they wrote *al-ṣirāṭ* with the *ṣād* that is changed from the *sīn* and left out the *sīn* which is the original. So when readings with *sīn* although the transcription is *ṣād*: the reading becomes of the original and thus they equalize. In this situation *Ishmām* reciting is

and that states clearly that the ʿUthmānic text was used as a means to restrict the already existent oral tradition, and did not generate it. The oral tradition was sometimes so powerful in the first generations that some readings were accepted as legitimate even though they had minor differences from the consonantal ʿUthmānic text.

Tenth: Ibn Mujāhid, with his encyclopedic knowledge, made it clear by announcing in his book *Jāmiʿ al-Qirā'āt* that he had not met any scholar in the field of Qur'ānic or linguistic studies who approved the Qur'ānic reading as authentic because it was compatible with Arabic rules even if it was not received from the earliest readers.[166] And when Ibn Miqsam (265 A.H.-354 A.H.) dared to announce that he believed that it was legitimate to accept any reading to be authentic if it did fit the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf,* even if it was not received through a chain of narrators, all scholars denounced his view, including Ibn Mujāhid, and he was charged by the head of the Islamic state with committing unlawful innovation and deserved to be punished. Ibn Miqsam regretted, or at least appeared to regret, his uncommon view, and that was the end of that un-Islamic, unfounded novelty.[167]

Eleventh: Small objected to al-Azami's assertion that the reading of the Qur'ān in the daily prayer was a guarantee of its preservation in the earliest Muslim generations, because, he claimed, only a small portion of the complete text of the Qur'ān was needed for prayers and daily devotional

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possible, a thing which cannot be if it was written with the original *sīn*. Re-editing in any manner other than the *sīn* is considered contrary to the transcription and the original [...]. However, clear departure from the transcription in a letter which is *mudgham* (assimilated), *mubaddal* (changed); *thābit* (fixed), *maḥdhūf* (omitted) or the like is not considered a contradiction to the norm if reciting in that manner has been confirmed and came in famous, profuse ways. That is why they did not consider the addition or omission of the *yā* in verse 70, *sūrah* 18, the *wāw* in verse 20, *sūrah* 63, or the *za* in verse 24, *sūrah* 83, and such as rejected or unacceptable departure from the transcription. Difference in such a situation is forgiven. That is because it is close and leads to one meaning. It is sanctioned by the correctness of the recitation as well its fame and acceptance." (al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fi ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, p.164. The English translation from al-Suyūṭī, *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'ān*, tr. Ḥamid Algar, Michael Schub and Ayman Abdel Haleem, U.K.: Garnet Publishing, 2011, p.183)

166 Quoted by Al-Wansharīsī, *Al-Miʿyār Almuʿrib*, Beirūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1981, 12/162

"ولم أر أحدا ممن أدركت من القراء وأهل العلم باللغة وأئمة العربية، يرخصون لأحد في أن يقرأ بحرف لم يقرأ به أحد من الأئمة الماضين، وإن كان جائزا في العربية، بل رأيتهم يشددون في ذلك وينهون عنه أشد النهي، ويروون الكراهية له عمن تقدمهم من مشايخهم، لئلا يجسر على القول في القرآن بالرأي أهل الزيغ، وينسبون من فعله إلى البدعة والخروج عن الجماعة، ومفارقة أهل القبلة، ومخالفة الأمة."

167 See al-Dhahabī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'a*, Riyadh: Markaz al-Malik Fayṣal, 1997, 1/383-386; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalā'*, Lebanon: Bayt al-Afkār, 2004, pp.3395-396

needs.[168] I hereby affirm unequivocally that Small knows close to nothing about Islamic daily life and devotional practices. Due to lack of space, I will mention only two well-known devotional acts:

- In a specific month each lunar year, called *Ramaḍān*, Muslims all over the world are supposed to read the whole text of the Qur'ān in the night prayers, and to read it throughout the days of that month as many times as possible, which is why that month is known as "*the month of the Qur'ān*."
- Any practicing Muslim is supposed to regularly read the whole text of the Qur'ān, usually at least once a month. Many early, well-known scholars and devout Muslims read it in its entirety every few days.[169] Muslims were so obsessed with reading the whole text of the Qur'ān repeatedly over a very short period of time that it led to the Prophet's ordering them not to read the whole Qur'an in less than three days.[170]

In sum, the Muslim nation was, from its start, a religious entity that centered its views and practices on the text of its holy book.

Twelfth: In its first centuries, the Muslim nation was ruled by both politicians and scholars. Scholars were in reality the main power that shaped the religious, social, and economical aspects of the nation.[171] The head readers of the main Islamic cities were central figures in their communities. Ibn abī Shayba (159-235 A.D.) narrated in his *Muṣannaf* that Mujāhid, who was one of the major early scholars of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth,* and *fiqh* said, "We were showing proudness (in front of others) because (we have) our reader ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Sā'ib (d. 64-73 A.D.?)".[172] In such circumstances it is absurd to think that the flow of the very early Qur'ānic oral tradition abruptly disappeared and was followed by the emergence of new, or partly new, oral readings. Any claim of the disappearance of the original reading and the emergence of new fabricated ones that owe their existence to the consonantal

168 Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p. 145

169 Al-Nawawī, *al-Tibyān fī Ādāb Ḥamalat al-Qur'ān*, fourth edition, Beirut: Dar ibn Ḥazm, 1996, pp.59-60

170 *Al-Tirmidhī*, *ḥadīth* no: 2950, *Abū Dawūd*, *ḥadīth* no: 1394

171 Many commentators from the first century believed that those mentioned in the Qur'ān "who have been entrusted with authority" (Q. 4:59) who are supposed to be obeyed by the Muslim nation are "the scholars".(see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 8/499-501)

172 Ibn abī Shaybah, *al- Muṣannaf*, *ḥadīth* no: 4402: 5

text of the ʿUthmānic recension flies in the face of the historical reality and bears the mark of a mulish and perverse imagination.

Thirteenth: The identification of the ten legitimate readers was “fixed” beginning with the generation that succeeded the Companions. It is acknowledged by historians that scholars of that generation were all tutored by the Companions, while the scholars of the third generation were students of the scholars of the second generation without any discontinuity. This makes Small’s hypothesis a pure illusion.

Fourteenth: The authentic readings were ascribed to particular readers not because they were created by them, but rather, as stated by Ibn al-Jazarī, because these readers chose them from the available authentic ones and kept reading them for a long time.[173] This means that these readers were only part of the chain of narrators that started from the Prophet.

Fifteenth: The earliest existing manuscripts from the first Islamic century do not reflect a level of chaos in their ways of reading that would lead to conflicts between Muslim scholars about how to make the silent consonantal text reflect the original pronunciations. Very few “readings” that do not belong to the ten received readings are found in the extant manuscripts, and we can separate these into two categories:

(1) The majority, which are in fact the result of scribal mistakes, and therefore cannot be considered as “variants” because they are in contradiction with the context or with the rules of grammar. Some of these we have visited before.

(2) A smaller group (tens) that does not contradict Arabic grammar rules and the context, and of which some are already known in Islamic tradition.[174] Regarding a few of these, it cannot be ascertained categorically whether or not they are the result of unintentional scribal error.[175]

173 Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 1/52: “وهذه الإضافة إضافة اختيار ودوام ولزوم لا إضافة اختراع ورأي واجتهاد”

174 See Intisar A. Rabb, “Non-Canonical Readings of the Qurʾan: Recognition and Authenticity Persist (The Himsī Reading),” in *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies*, 2006, Vol. 8, Issue 2, pp.84-127

175 We can add a third category, which is “the misread texts by the orientalists!” such as many “variants” read by Mingana, and the claim of Gerd Puin (*Observations*, p.109) that one of the Sana’a manuscripts has *qīla*, قيل instead of the standard *qul*, قل . Q. 34:49, which is claimed to be an unearthed “variant” not preserved in the Islamic tradition. T. Altikulaç consulted the manuscript mentioned by Puin and witnesses that “the scribe forgot to write the word; when someone or personally he noticed the omission, this word was inserted in the text. However, as all signs resembling dots used as stops signs at

This scriptural fact reinforces the authenticity of legitimate readings and gives solid, concrete proof that readings accepted by the later generations were not the result of spontaneous free choices of pronunciations.[176] How then can one explain the presence of this tiny number of readings which do not belong to the ten legitimate readings? The answer is as follows:

(1) These few "variant readings" available in the earliest manuscripts are either not authentic readings, and therefore would obviously not affect the Muslim claim of the authenticity of the ten readings, or

(2) They are completely, or partially, authentic, which would also not throw any doubt on the authenticity of these ten readings, because they constitute "extra readings" and not "competing readings." Surely today no one can prove the authenticity of these "variants," because all that is known is that these manuscripts show readings known about in the earliest centuries. It cannot be proven that they can be traced back to the Prophet. What is apparent is that the ten legitimate readings do not contain all of the original readings,[177] but only parts of the original readings,[178] because, as shown before, the Muslim nation was not commanded to keep all of the authentic readings.

To make the situation appear historically as tragic as possible, Small insisted that Muslims did not keep one authoritative text. He writes, "If one authoritative pronunciation was not known at lbn Mujāhid's time, there is little hope of someone today recovering one from an even earlier time." These are unjustified musings, because Muslims have never claimed that such a "singular text," as imagined by Small, existed. Ibn Mujāhid was not searching for that one Qur'ānic text, he was trying to limit the legitimate readings circulating, so that Muslims could memorize them.[179]

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the end of the *āyat* [verse] were not covered by this word that was written later, these dots were identified by Dr. Puin as the dots of قيل. When the word is enlarged and examined it is seen that the *yā* between *qāf* and *lām* has no tooth." (Altikulaç, *Al-Muṣḥaf Al-Sharīf: Attributed To ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib*, Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 2011, p.143).

176 Small himself acknowledges that "arguments that this entire edifice is a pious fabrication, though, are unlikely, in that there are manuscripts that preserve discernible features of distinctive Readings of the Qur'ān." (Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p.153)

177 Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 1/36-37

178 Some of the earliest scholars who collected the accepted readings had more than ten readers, such as Abū ʿubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224 A.H.), Abū Ḥātim al-Sajistānī (d. 248), Abū Isḥāq al-Qāḍī (d. 282), Abū Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310), and others.

179 See Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, *Al-Ibāna ʿan Mʿānī al-Qirāʾāt*, Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Maṣr, [n.d.], pp.86-9

The central issue in studying the active history of the Qur'ānic text is the presence of the phenomenon of *ikhtiyārāt*, which kept generating new readings. *Ikhtiyārāt* refers to the selection by certain qualified scholars of one or more readings from among a number of existing original readings. *Ikhtiyār* (singular) is based on the most authentic and fluent ways of reading, in the scholars' judgment.[180]This phenomenon "results in" new readings, but does not invent new variant readings, as it involves making selections from the extant multiple, original readings of the thousands of Qur'ānic verses. This is the direct cause of the many readings (which are based on a few of the multiple original readings) being attributed to different scholars.[181] When Ibn Mujāhid was asked to make his own *ikhtiyār*, he refused because he was of the opinion that the Muslim nation should limit the authentic readings so that it would be possible to memorize them, not to reconstruct new ones.[182] Small mentioned what Ibn Mujāhid did without showing the slightest hint of being aware of the state of the Qur'ānic readings in the four earlier centuries. He just appeared to be trying hard to make it seem as though Ibn Mujāhid and the other scholars had lost the one original text, which forced them to opt for choosing to legitimize a whole range of non-identical readings.

The Hidden Agenda of a Missionary/Orientalist

To better understand the true methodology and aim of Small's dissertation, one needs to read his book *Holy Books Have a History*, where one can see behind the mask. One can uncover quite easily Small's old-fashioned crusader mentality by examining his involvement in studies related to the beast "three sixes": *Islam.* His unfair, critical view of Islam is seen in his distortion of the so-called enemy's image and his application of double standards when comparing Christianity with Islam.

180 Aḥmad ʿAlī Imām, V*ariant readings of the Qur'an: A Critical Study of Their Historical and Linguistic Origins*, Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998, p.141

181 The reading of Khalaf, one of the ten legitimate readings, has no readings in its verses not found in one, or more, of the other nine legitimate readings. The reading of Khalaf is a pure *ikhtiyār* from the other authentic readings available in his lifetime. Today, just by using our ten legitimate readings we can "create" hundreds or even thousands of readings by selecting from these readings one from each passage. Thus, when we read that there existed fifty readings in the fourth century of the Hegira, this does not mean that there were too many (authentic) readings to choose from; it is all about the mechanism of *ikhtiyār* which helped in promulgating new readings.

182 See al-Dhahabī, *Maʿrifat al-Qurrā'*, Beirut: al-Risalah, 1404 A.H., 1/271

• While Small did not deign to consider any of the sound oral tradition transmitted in the first three centuries under the supervision of the great Islamic schools and the scrutiny of the most famous scholars in the Islamic state who were committed to glorify its holy book, he failed to give a single, *specific* proof for the integrity of the text of the Old Testament other than a "prophecy" (?) in Isaiah (ch.53) about the suffering Messiah.[183] He did not even subject the Old Testament to any scriptural test. *If* the integrity of all the Holy Books should be weighed on the scale of the surviving copies, why did Small exclude the Old Testament from this test? The answer is obvious: the gap of time between the Pentateuch, for instance, and the oldest extant manuscripts of it, is as long as ten centuries or more. A total scriptural silence. The history of the Masoretic text (the Hebrew text which is the basis of present day translations of the Old Testament) and the state of its manuscripts would not convince readers of the soundness of his argument. It is enough here to cite the statement of the conservative Christian scholar, Roy E. Beacham, the department chairman and Professor of Old Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, "The Masoretic text should not be perceived as a perfect copy of the originals because *no such thing as the Masoretic text or one Masoretic text actually exists*. Although Jewish scholars in the first century A.D. apparently sought to standardize the OT text, experts debate whether these scholars actually ever created one, single "master copy" of the entire corpus of OT scriptures. Certainly no such "master copy" exists today. Even if these scribes did produce a "master copy" in the first century A.D., no evidence exists that such a text was ever accepted, much less ever portrayed, as a perfect replica of the originals."[184]

• I believe that "Ehrmanophobia" is shaping the studies made by New Testament textual criticism scholars, not only in the debate between the conservatives and the liberals, but between the Christian conservatives and Muslims, even though Muslims do not take all of Ehrman's statements and judgments for granted. Muslims, who are concerned with

183 See Keith E. Small, *Holy Books Have a History*, pp.93, 118

184 Roy E. Beacham, "The Old Testament Text and the Version Debate," in Roy E. Beacham and Kevin T. Bauder, eds. *One Bible only?: examining exclusive claims for the King James Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001, p.63, [italics mine]

New Testament studies and interfaith dialogue, esteem Ehrman's studies highly and appreciate his zeal to discover the truth or what seems to be the truth, but they do not share with him many of his conclusions outside the circle of the corruptions of the New Testament. Even in the textual critic matters, one can see that the present work is closer to the methodology of Eldon Epp and William Petersen than to that of Ehrman.

• The demonization of the Muslim nation and its scholars was part of the study made by Small to convince the reader that the New Testament has been better preserved than the Qur'ānic text. Small insisted that Muslims intentionally ignore scriptural proof when studying the history of the Qur'ān because they are too afraid to face the truth of the distortion of the earliest text. He did not even quote the Islamic view, or allude to it. Even when he was forced to talk about the Islamic tradition, he chose to distort the truth. He said, for instance, "The current printed texts of the Qur'ān are based on medieval Islamic tradition instead of the collation and analysis of extant manuscripts."[185] So, it is not "the early tradition." Rather, it is what he minimized as being "medieval Islamic tradition," even though the medieval era started from the emergence of Islam or before that!?

• Small portrayed Islam and Christianity as opposite in their views on truth. He dared to say, "Muslims and Christians usually start from different points when it comes to considering and defending the authenticity and integrity of their scriptures. Muslims tend to work from a position known as "fideism," that the truth of a religion rests ultimately on your faith in that religion. Christians have traditionally worked from a position known as "evidentialism," that the truth of a religion can be demonstrated by appealing to evidence, and especially historical evidence."[186]

It is indeed strange to put forth such a claim about Islam when its holy book, the Qur'ān, often asks for evidence to be shown for a claim. "Bring your proof, if you are truthful!" (Q. 2:111; 27:64) It is bizarre to accuse Muslims of embracing "fideism" while anyone familiar with the Islamic literature knows well that Muslims wrote scores of books on what they called "proofs of prophethood" where they provide overwhelming evidence for the prophethood of Muḥammad, and answer all the objections

185 Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, p.3

186 Keith E. Small, *Holy Books Have a History*, p.5

made by Christians, Jews, idol worshippers, Zoroastrians, and atheists. And it is more than peculiar to claim that Christians are evidentialists. Why did Small not allude to Paul's statements that Christianity is not compatible with man's wisdom: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." (1Corinthians 1:17); "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1Corinthians 1:21); "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." (1 Corinthians 3:19)? How could Small ignore the well-known statement made by Tertullian, the greatest Christian theologian of the second century: "*Certum est, quia impossibile est*",[187] and the other scandalous one made by the Doctor of the Church, Anselm of Canterbury: "Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam et hoc credo, quia, nisi credidero, non intelligam."[188] Which is probably drawn from Saint Augustine's *Homilies on the Gospel of John,* (on John 7:14-18): "Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that you may understand."? Is Small ignorant about the fact that Thomas Aquinas, the greatest Christian theologian and philosopher of the Middle Ages, who so bravely answered atheism, depended for most of his argument on what had been written by Muslims?[189] Is Small unaware that Jews were dependent on Muslim arguments in their debates with Christians, as revealed by the prominent "Israeli" orientalist, Hava Lazarus[190], and others?

• To make it look as though Muslims are afraid to reveal the "scandalous" fact of the Qur'ān as it appears in the manuscripts of Sana'a[191], Small mentions that these manuscripts have not been published yet by Muslims,

187 "it is certain, because impossible," Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, v. 4

188 "Nor do I seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe that I may understand. For this, too, I believe, that, unless I first believe, I shall not understand." Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch.1

189 See on influence of Muslim scholars on Aquinas and other Christian theologians, "Al-Ghazali," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, E. J. Brill and Luzac, 1913-1938, 3/147; Diané Collinson, Kathryn Plant, and Robert Wilkinson, *Fifty Eastern thinkers*, London: Routledge, 2000, p.35

190 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity," in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (Jan., 1996), pp.65-70

191 Almost one thousand Qur'ānic codices (not complete copies).

and quoted a comment made by an anonymous reader of a Yemeni newspaper where he asked that the manuscripts be gotten rid of. The truth of the matter, that Small knows full well, is that only non-Muslim scholars have had any real opportunity to study these manuscripts. First of all, these scholars did photograph all these manuscripts, and second, they frequently visited *Dar al-Makhṭūṭāt* in Yemen to have a look at its manuscripts. Many western non-Muslim researchers testified that the Yemeni officials were cooperative,[192] yet Muslim scholars did not enjoy this privilege. For example, Professor al-Azami, a Saudi citizen and one of the greatest Muslim scholars of today, who more than thirty years ago was awarded *The King Faisal International Award for Islamic Studies*, the highest Islamic prize, was allowed to photograph no more than twenty random parchments of these manuscripts, even though he had expressly traveled to Yemen for the purpose and had benefited from the intercession of some of the most influential political figures there.[193] All the manuscripts of Sana'a were supposed to be published a few years ago through the *Jumʿa al-Mājid Centre for Culture and Heritage*, and the Yemeni officials received the copiers, but everything was suddenly frozen because Yemeni officials were looking for a better deal with the Emaratian institute.[194] And finally, let me ask Small why he did not ask his close friend and partner G. Puin for the real reason for his refusal to publish or share the pictures of the Sana'a manuscripts, even though he was asked by many scholars in the west who were interested in studying them, thus allowing himself to be the source of many rumors about these manuscripts?[195]

192 Sadeghi and Goudarzi recorded these testimonies; see Ṣan'ā' 1, pp.33-6

193 He provided information about his travel to Yemen in a telephone conversation.

194 See Scott MacMillan, "Sana'a: City of the Book," in *History Today*, Apr 2011, Vol. 61, Issue 4 (online copy devoid of page numbering)

195 Some of Gerd Puin's comments which he made for the media are, allow me to say, childish, and made for pure provocation. He said last year, for instance, that he did not disclose in his article "Observations" the manuscripts where he noticed a non-ʿUthmānic arrangement of sūrah-s because "there is good reason to expect that these sheets would immediately be destroyed." (Sana'a: City of the Book). Yemeni students were already helping Puin in reading and classifying these manuscripts, and finding such manuscripts would not have taken a great effort had the Yemeni staff wanted to destroy them. Altikulaç already consulted some of the folios which Puin talked about. (*Al-Muṣḥaf Al-Sharīf: Attributed To ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib*, p.144 Eng, 172 Ar.). So such a foolish allegation is yet another black spot in the academic career of G. Puin and cannot be used by honest scholars to distort the image of Muslims.

• Even though most of Small's crucial deductions are based on the palimpsests,[196] he intentionally deluded the reader by failing to discuss the details mentioned in the studies made about them. All he did was mention some of what Alba Fedeli wrote about two of the folios.[197] He did refer to Asma Hilali's paper "The Sanaa Palimpsest: Introductory Remarks to Philological and Literary Aspects"[198] in the reference section of his book, but failed to include her concluding remarks, because that would have ruined his premise. Small did not even try to refute Hilali's study, he just neglected the whole issue. The other known palimpsest used by Small is the so-called "Mingana Palimpsest," and what is shocking here is that Small knows of the controversy about the transcription of the Qur'ānic text of the *scriptio inferior* of this manuscript made by Mingana, and he had included in his references Fedeli's article "Mingana And The Manuscript of Mrs. Agnes Smith Lewis, One Century Later."[199] Yet, he still did not think it necessary to allude to Fedeli's telling statement that "the inevitable and easy conclusion is that all the transcription can be suspected to be wrong."[200]

• Small passed by the extremely critical and intriguing Biblical problems without giving them the needed emphasis.

To sum up,

1- Small's claims on the preservation of the original text of the Qur'ān

(a) Are prejudiced, and founded on missionary's wishes.

(b) Neglect to check the correct source, which is the oral tradition.

(c) Do not present anything from the extant manuscripts to substantiate its deductions.

2- If Small were to use the same methodology to study the New and Old Testaments, he would find that their integrity would be disproved.

196 "The earliest available Qur'ānic manuscripts contained a very precise consonantal line of text. Only the Qur'ānic palimpsests showed a degree of variability in the consonantal text that approached the degree of flexibility exhibited in the New Testament manuscript tradition." (Keith E. Small, *Holy Books Have a History*, p.60)

197 See A. Fedeli, "Early Evidences of Variant Readings in Qur'ānic Manuscripts," pp.311-34

198 Conference paper given 14 November at "The Qur'ān: Text, History & Culture," 12-14 November 2009, SOAS, University of London, 2009.

199 Published in *Manuscripta Orientalia*, 2005, Volume 11, No. 3, pp.3-7

200 Ibid., p. 5

Non-Muslim Scholars Testify to the Originality of the Text of the Qur'an

Popular missionary literature continues to use dogmatic discourse to persuade lay readers to believe that the corruption of the Qur'anic text is a banal fact only rejected by Muslim propagandists. Although this falsehood has already been refuted by the arguments given above, I would like the reader to consider the following:

If the distortion of the Qur'an were as evident as this literature would have people believe, one would expect all Christian authors interested in the history of the Qur'an to concur on this point, as well as to proclaim, without the slightest hesitation, that the New Testament, which they believe to be the last written divine message on earth, is unequivocally better preserved than "Muḥammad's book".

The true fact of the matter is that many non-Muslim scholars from different backgrounds and academic affiliations, some of whom are devoted, or even zealous, Christians, have acknowledged, in their academic studies which were written mainly for a non-Muslim, western audience, that the Qur'ānic text was transmitted faithfully from the time of the prophet of Islam to all the subsequent generations. Here are some of their testimonies:

1. William Muir, a Scottish Orientalist, elected principal of Edinburgh University and president of the Royal Asiatic Society, whose books are one of the main sources of the distortion of the image of Islam and its prophet in modern Christian polemic studies, writes, "The recension of Othman has been handed down to us unaltered. So carefully, indeed, has it been preserved, that there are no variations of importance, we might almost say no variations at all, among the innumerable copies of the Coran scattered throughout the vast bounds of the empire of Islam. Contending and embittered factions, taking their rise in the murder of Othman himself within a quarter of a century from the death of Mahomet, have ever since rent the Mahometan world. Yet but ONE CORAN has been current amongst them; and the consentaneous use by them all in every age up to the present day of the same Scripture, is an irrefragable proof that we have now before us the very text prepared by command of the unfortunate Caliph. There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries[201] with so pure a text."[202]

201 Muir's book was written in the 13th Century of the Hegira.

202 William Muir, *Life of Mohamet: from original sources*, London: Smith, 1878, appendix, pp.557-58

2. Georges-Louis Leblois, a French pastor and author, stated that, "Le Coran est aujourd'hui le seul livre sacré qui ne présente pas de variantes notables."[203]

3. Kenneth Cragg, the Anglican priest and prolific scholar, reported that "the consensus of view—Shiʿahs excepted—is that the Qur'ān as it stood in ʿUtmān's recension omits no significant and includes no extraneous material. The Prophet's death had decisively closed the Book."[204]

4. Bosworth Smith, a Catholic historian and biographer, stated in his provocative book, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism,* "We have a book absolutely unique in its origin, in its preservation, and in the chaos of its contents, but on the authenticity of which no one has ever been able to cast a serious doubt."[205]

5. Philip Hitti, a Maronite Christian from Lebanon and a leading scholar of Arabic Studies in the United States, states that "Modern critics agree that the copies current today are almost exact replicas of the original mother-text as compiled by Zayd, and that, on the whole, the text of the Koran today is as Muhammad produced it. As some Semitic scholar remarked, there are probably more variations in the reading of one chapter of Genesis in Hebrew than there are in the entire Koran."[206]

6. Stanley Lane Poole, a British orientalist, who was Professor of Arabic studies at Dublin University, wrote, "It is an immense merit in the Kur-an that there is no doubt as to its genuineness […] that very word we can now read with full confidence that it has remained unchanged through nearly thirteen hundred years."[207]

7. John Burton, professor of Arabic at the University of Edinburgh, says in the closing sentence of his *magnum opus*, *The Collection of the Qur'ān,* that the Qur'ān as we have it today, is "the text which has come

203 "Qur'ān is today the only holy book that does not show notable variants," Louis Leblois, *Le Koran et la Bible Hébraïque*, Paris: Fischbacher, 1887, p.54

204 Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, p.97

205 Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875, p.41

206 Philip Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London: Macmillan, 1937, p.123

207 Edward William Lane and Stanley Lane Poole, *Selections from the Kur-an*, London: Trubner, 1879, p.c

down to us in the form in which it was organized and approved by the Prophet […]. What we have today in our hands is the *Muṣḥaf* of Muhammad."[208]

8. Denise Masson, French islamologist, said in the introduction of her French translation of the Qur'ān, "Eventually, in spite of these points of debate, we can say that the text presently in our possession contains the criteria of a substantial fidelity."[209]

9. Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, the French orientalist, said, "Le Coran a été fixé, peu de temps après la révélation, par un texte authentique qu'il n'y a aucune raison sérieuse de considérer comme altéré."[210]

10. Hamilton A. R. Gibb, one of the leading orientalists of the twentieth century, writes, "It seems reasonably well established that no material changes were introduced and that the original form and contents of Mohammed's discourses were preserved with scrupulous precision."[211]

11. Theodor Nöldeke, one of the greatest German orientalists, said in his book *Geschichte des Qorans* (*History of the Qur'ān*) that the Qur'ān is "Alles spricht demnach dafür, daß der Text des othmanischen Qoräns so vollständig und treu war, wie man es nur erwarten konnte."[212]

12. Richard Bell, a British Arabist at the University of Edinburgh, best known for his translation of the Qur'ān, announced that, "Modern Study of the Qur'an has not in fact raised any serious question of its authenticity".[213]

13. Adrian Brockett, professor of Arab and Islamic Studies at Durham University and one of the reputed scholars in the field of the early textual

208 John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, pp.239-40

209 *Le Coran*, trad. De D. Masson, editions Gallimard, 1967, p.xl. (this quote is translated into English by the Christian apologist William F. Campbell, in his published book *The Qur'an and the Bible in the Light of History and Science*, Upper Darby, PA: Middle East Resources, 1986, section: C. variant readings in the Qur'an and the Bible, Online text)

210 "The Qur'ān was fixed, shortly after its revelation, with an authentic text that there is no serious reason to consider as corrupted," Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Les Institutions Musulmanes*, Paris: E. Flammarion, 1921, p.42

211 Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey*, London: Oxford University Press US, 1962, p.34

212 "All that was said supports the view that the Qur'ān of ʿUthmān was complete and loyal to the highest level that can be expected," Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, Leipzig: Dieterich, 1919, 2/93

213 Richard Bell and William Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970, p.51

history of the Qur'ān, stated in his *Illustrations of Orientalist Misuse of Qur'ānic Variant Readings* that Muslims kept the Qur'ānic text through all the generations with a high strictness.[214] He declared elsewhere that "the transmission of the Qur'ān after the death of Muhammad was essentially static, rather than organic. There was a single text, and nothing significant, not even allegedly abrogated material, could be taken out nor could anything be put in."[215]

14. Neal Robinson, one of the leading British orientalists today and a senior lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Leeds, wrote, "In broad outline the Muslim tradition has met with widespread acceptance from non-Muslim scholars."[216]

15. Thomas Walker Arnold, an eminent British orientalist, who was Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental Studies, University of London, tells us that "there is a general agreement by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars that the text of this recension substantially corresponds to the actual utterances of Muhammad himself."[217]

16. Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, one of the most reputed of Dutch orientalists, avowed that "all sects and parties have the same text of the Qoran."[218]

17. Charles Cutler Torrey, an orientalist and Semitic scholar, stated that the Qur'ān "lies before us practically unchanged from the form which he himself [i.e. Muhammad] gave it."[219]

18. R. V. C. Bodley, the American orientalist, proclaimed, "Today there is no possible doubt that the Koran which is read wherever there are Moslems is the same version as that translated from Hafsa's master copy."[220]

214 See Adrian Brockett, "Illustrations of Orientalist Misuse of Qur'ānic Variant Readings," paper presented at the colloquium on the study of *ḥadīth*, Oxford, 1982

215 Adrian Brockett, "The Value of Hafs And Warsh Transmissions For The Textual History of The Qur'ān," in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches Of The History of Interpretation Of The Qur'ān*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p.44

216 Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, New York: SUNY Press, 1991, p.194

217 Thomas Walker Arnold, *The Islamic Faith*, Lahore: Vaqar Publications, 1983, p.9

218 Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Mohammedanism: lectures on its origin, its religious and political growth and its present state*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916, p.27

219 Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, New York: KTAV Pub. House,1967, p.2

220 R. V. C. Bodley, *The Messenger: The Life of Mohammed*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1969, p.235

19. Rom Landau, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of the Pacific, said that "it became the task of Muhammad's secretary, Zayd ibn-Thabit, to bring these sayings together in textual form. Abū Bakr had directed the work, and later, after a revision at the command of Uthman, the Koran took its standard and final form that has come down to us unchanged."[221]

20. Forster F. Arbuthnot, a notable British orientalist, observed that "a final and complete text of the Koran was prepared within twenty years after the death (A.D. 632) of Muhammad, and that this has remained the same, without any change or alteration by enthusiasts, translators, or interpolators, up to the present time. It is to be regretted that the same cannot be said of all the books of the Old and New Testaments."[222]

I think that statements made by scholars like the ones above are what led Todd Lawson, Islamologist at the University of Toronto, to dismiss as one of his "amateurish deductions"[223] the claim made by "Ibn Warraq" (a pseudonym of the pseudo-*scholar*) that "Most scholars believe that there are interpolations in the Koran**.**"[224]

221 Rom Landau, *Islam and the Arabs*, London, G. Allen & Unwin, 1958, p.200

222 Forster F. Arbuthnot, *The Construction of the Bibe and the Koran*, London: Watts & Co., 1885, p.6

223 Todd Lawson, review: "The Origins of the Koran (Book)," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Jul-Sep2002, Vol. 122, Issue 3, p.658

224 Ibn Warraq, ed. *Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book*, Amherst, New York: Prometheus Book, 1998, p.17

APPENDIX

"JESUS' GOSPEL"?

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.
— Aldous Huxley

The "Gospel" in the New Testament and the *Qur'ān*

What is a "gospel"? And what is "the Gospel"? And where is "the Gospel"?

The English word *gospel* is derived from the Old English *gōd-spell* (good news), which is a word-for-word translation of the Greek word "εὐαγγέλιον" [*euangelion*], which has the identical meaning.

Among the four Evangelists, the term "gospel" was used by only Mark and Matthew, and it was heavily used before that by Paul in the epistles ascribed to him. Although the noun was used many times, we cannot find in the New Testament any direct or clear definition of it. What we *can* detect is that it had different meanings in the communities that received the New Testament texts. These significant differences make the term problematic.

"The gospel" in the epistles of Paul is an abstraction that is attributed to different beings: "the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2Cor. 11:7), "the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:19; 1Cor. 9:12; 2Cor. 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Phil. 1:27; 1Thess. 3:2), or "the gospel of his Son" (Rom. 1:9). Paul refers to "my gospel" (Rom. 2:16; 16:25) and "our gospel" (2Cor. 4:3) and affirms that there is "no other gospel" (Gal. 1:7). He talks too about "the gospel" (Rom. 10:16; 11:28; 1Cor. 4:15; 9:14, 18).[1]

The meanings of the term "gospel" in the New Testament are extremely various. Here are some examples of its different connotations.

- The kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:14-15)
- The good news of what God has done on behalf of humanity in Christ (Romans 1:1-4)

1 See F.J.M., "Gospel, Gospels," in Paul J. Achtemeier et al., eds. *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, revised edition, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996, p. 385

- The narrative of Jesus' life/message (Mark 1:1)
- The story told about Jesus after his death and resurrection (Galatians 1:11-12)

The conflicting meanings of the term "gospel"[2] tell us that this word, as it appears in the New Testament, is essentially ambiguous. Jesus used the term in one way, which differs from the way it was used by the later communities who dealt with the oral tradition without strict rules.

The existence of conflicting meanings for key terms like "gospel" in the New Testament reveals clearly that the transmission of the message of Jesus to the generations who lived after his ascension has a severe lack of fidelity and clarity. This is a perplexing phenomenon that needs much study in order to determine its source and motive. It is easy to see that the situation in regard to the word "gospel" is similar to those for other knotty New Testament terms such as "the Son of man," and *paraklētos*, "παράκλητος" (commonly translated as "comforter" or "advocate"), which lost their clear meanings when they were inserted into the New Testament text.

"The Son of man" as a religious term was borrowed from the Old Testament, where it is connected with the end of time (Book of Daniel). In the New Testament, this same term is transformed into three distinct and incompatible meanings: *Apocalyptic Sayings*, the Son of man will descend to earth to gather the elect and to judge; (2) *Passion Sayings*, the suffering and defeated Son of man; and (3) *Sayings Connected with Jesus' Ministry*. The third group of Son of man sayings is the most heterogeneous, but all refer to some aspect of Jesus' earthly ministry.[3]

Another striking example is the word *parakletos;* Johannes Behm, in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* writes, "The use of the term παράκλητος in the NT, though restricted to the Johannine writings, does not make any consistent impression, nor does it fit smoothly into the history of the word as described [earlier]. In 1 John 2:1, where Jesus Christ is called the παράκλητος of sinning Christians before the Father, the meaning is obviously "advocate," and the image of a trial before God's court determines the meaning. In John 16:7-11 (cf. 15:26) we again find the idea of a trial in

2 See also J. K. Elliott, "Mark and the Teaching of Jesus: An Examination of ΛΟΓΟΣ and ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ," in William L. Petersen, John S. Vos and Henk j. de Jonge, eds., *Sayings of Jesus: Canonical and Non-canonical: Essays in Honour of Tjitze Baarda*, pp.41-5

3 See Trent C. Butler, ed. *Holman Bible Dictionary*, Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991, pp.1291-292

which the Paraclete, the Spirit, appears (16:8-11). The Spirit, however, is not the defender of the disciples before God - nor the advocate of God or Christ before men, which involves an unwarranted shift of thought - but their counsel in relation to the world. Nor is the legal metaphor adhered to strictly. What is said about the sending, activity and nature of this paraclete (16:7, 16:13-15, 15:26, 14:14 f, 14:26) belongs to a very different sphere, and here (cf. Jesus in 14:16) παράκλητος seems to have the broad and general sense of "helper." The only thing one can say *for certain is that the sense of "comforter" [...] does not fit any of the NT passages. Neither Jesus nor the Spirit is described as "comforter."* [4]

In the Qur'ān, "the gospel" is a holy scripture sent down by God to his prophet Jesus as guidance to the Israeli people. It is a verbal inspi-ration to Jesus from God through Gabriel, the Holy Spirit.

The essence of "the gospel" in the Islamic lexicon can be found in three Qur'ānic verses,

﴿ وَقَفَّيْنَا عَلَى آثَارِهِم بِعَيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ مُصَدِّقاً لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الإِنجِيلَ فِيهِ هُدًى وَنُورٌ
وَمُصَدِّقاً لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ وَلْيَحْكُمْ أَهْلُ الإِنجِيلِ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ فِيهِ وَمَن لَّمْ يَحْكُم بِمَا
أَنزَلَ اللّهُ فَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴾

"And in their footsteps, We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, a confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God. Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allah hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge (by the light of) what Allah hath revealed they are (no better than) those who rebel." Q: 5:46-7

﴿ وَمُصَدِّقاً لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَلأُحِلَّ لَكُم بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجِئْتُكُم بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُواْ
اللّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴾

"(I come to you) to attest the Law which was before me. And to make lawful to you a part of what was (before) forbidden to you. I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord. So fear Allah and obey me." Q. 3:50

So, Jesus' Gospel is (1) a written book (2) coming from God (3) that ordered the Israeli nation to obey the Torah commandments (4) with a few exceptions, by making lawful some of that which had been forbidden before.

4 Gerhard Kittel, ed. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968, 5/803-804 [italics mine].

The Qur'ānic stress on the similarity between the Gospel, *al-Injīl*, and the Torah can be seen in the joining of these two words nine times. The word *al-Injīl* occurs in the Qur'ān, by itself, only three times. So we can see that the Gospel and the Torah share many fundamental features.

The Lost Gospel

The majority of scholars agree that the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are not books composed fresh from their authors' pens. Each is the final stage of a prior live oral tradition, not a pure product of these three authors.

Daniel B. Wallace acknowledges that "it is quite *impossible* to hold that the three synoptic gospels were completely independent from each other. In the least, they had to have shared a common oral tradition. But the vast bulk of NT scholars today would argue for much more than that. [...] it is quite *impossible*—and ultimately *destructive of the faith*—to maintain that there is total independence among the gospel writers."[5]

In the quest for the earliest sources, scholars inaugurated what is called "the synoptic problem," which is an attempt to explain the similarity of the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke to each other over against John.[6] The latest in-depth studies show that the synoptic problem is one of the most intriguing problems of New Testament scholarship, and that it has, of a certainty, not been resolved.[7] We will review some of the theories that tend to resolve the synoptic problem to show how delicate the situation is and to show that these theories are based on indirect proofs.

(1) *The Two-Source Hypothesis*. This is the most common solution proposed for the synoptic problem, and it is based on three pillars:

- Mark is the first written Gospel, and the source for Matthew and Luke.
- There is a hypothetical document composed in Greek that contains a number of "sayings." It is called Q, short for the German *Quelle*, meaning "source."
- Matthew and Luke composed their respective books independently.[8]

5 Daniel B. Wallace, The Synoptic Problem, [italics mine]. http://bible.org/article/synoptic-problem (6/30/2011)

6 James M. Robinson, *The Gospel of Jesus, A Historical search for the original good news*, New York: HarperCollins, 2006, p.4

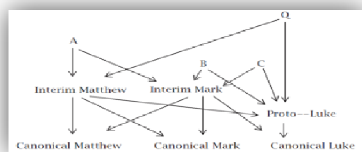
7 W.S. Vorster, "Through the Eyes of a Historian," in Patrick J. Hartin and J. H. Petzer, *Text and interpretation: new approaches in the criticism of the New Testament*, Leiden: Brill, 1991, p.23

8 See David E. Aune, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, p.243

(2) *The Farrer Theory*. Farrer accepted the priority of Mark as proposed by the Two-Source Hypothesis, but rejected the Q hypothesis, and proposed, as an alternative, the idea that Luke had used the books of Matthew and Mark. He stated, "The Q hypothesis is not, of itself, a probable hypothesis. It is simply the sole alternative to the supposition that St. Luke had read St. Matthew (or *vice versa*). It needs no refutation except the demonstration that its alternative is possible. It hangs on a single thread; cut that, and it falls by its own weight."[9]

(3) *The Two-Gospel Hypothesis*. It is a theory submitted by Griesbach and propounded again, in its current form, by William Farmer. The solution claims the priority of Matthew, and that Luke depended on Matthew when he wrote his Gospel, and that Mark was the last composed Gospel written as a conflation of Matthew and Luke.[10]

(4) *The Theory of M.-E. Boismard.* This is a complex elaboration of the Two-Source Hypothesis, involving multiple editions and levels of interrelationship.[11] Boismard proposes "a Palestinian proto-gospel (A) a Gentile–Christian revision of it (B), and an early independent document, perhaps from Palestine (C) as well as the Q sayings source, an "interim Matthew" (dependent on A and Q), an "interim Mark" (dependent on A, B, and C), and a "proto-Luke" (dependent on "interim Matthew," B, C, and Q). Canonical Matthew is thus dependent on "interim Mark" and "interim Matthew." Canonical Mark is at least dependent on "interim Mark" with perhaps a link to "interim Matthew." Canonical Luke is dependent on "interim Mark" and "proto-Luke."[12]



The Theory of M.-E. Boismard

9 Austin Farrer, "On Dispensing with Q," in D. E. Nineham, ed. *Studies in the Gospels*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967, p. 62

10 See W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis*, New York: Macmillan, 1964; repr. Western North Carolina Press, Dillsboro, NC , 1976

11 See P. Benoit and M. - E. Boismard, *Synopse des Quatre Evangiles en Français avec parallèles des apocrypes et des pères*, Vol. 2, Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1972; Paul J. Achtemeier with others, ed. *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, p. 1082.

12 David E. Aune, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, p. 248

(5) *The Augustinian hypothesis*. This is the traditional position held by the Church until the eighteenth century.[13] It was offered by Saint Augustine in his book *Consensus of the Gospels* 1.2.4. Saint Augustine's view is that the order of Gospels as it appears in the New Testament is the same as the chronological order of its composition.

Conclusion:

The best that can be taken from the preceding theories is as follows:

- The Gospels are not the starting point of the collected sayings of Jesus.
- There is no acceptable argument for a divine source for the Gospels, so a natural reason for the common material in Matthew and Luke needs to be sought.
- It appears quite plausible to accept the existence of a prior written document that was a source for Matthew and Luke.
- The Q hypothesis is the only plausible theory that explains the word-for-word agreement between Matthew and Luke when they do not follow Mark.[14]

How Did Scholars Arrive at This Hypothetical Q?

After scholars accepted the fact that Matthew and Luke used the Gospel of Mark, based on numerous undeniable signs, they noticed that Matthew and Luke shared common material that does not exist in Mark. The parallelism, which consists of sharing of the majority of the words of the common passages, is extremely clear. This led to the belief that there is a common source for Matthew and Luke, and that this source, as the majority of Q advocates believe, is not an oral tradition; it is a written text in Greek which was quoted word for word many times by the two evangelists. This common text consists of a compilation of Jesus' sayings, with rare exceptions.

Does the Qur'anic claim make sense?

Is the Qur'ānic perception of the Gospel of Jesus less logical than the other theories? What I think, in the light of existing, concrete evidence, is that the answer is NO, for many cogent reasons.

13 For the Church Fathers' views before Augustine, see Cl. Coulot, art. "Synoptique," in Jaques Briend et Michel Quesnel, eds. *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, Paris: Letouzey, 2005, 13/790-91

14 Marcus Borg estimated that ninety percent of contemporary gospel scholars believe in the existence of Q (See Marcus Borg and others, eds. *The Lost Gospel Q, the Original Sayings of Jesus*, Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 1996, p.15)

- All the theories lack direct physical proof. Q and the Jesus gospel are both hypothetical documents, and there is no reference to them in the known ancient writings.
- The *Jesus gospel hypothesis* shares with most of the other "theories" the belief in an ancient source(s), and agrees with the majority of scholars that that source was a written document.
- The Qur'ānic perception of the matter is not decidedly different from many other academic solutions for the synoptic problem. Here are some examples.
    - J. G. Eichhorn, after reiterating G. E. Lessing's theory and elaborating it, defended the hypothesis that a short historical sketch of the life of Christ, which may be called the Original Gospel, was the basis both of the earlier gospels used during the first two centuries, and of the first three of our present Gospels.[15]
    - The *Jerusalem school hypothesis*, which gives Luke a priority position, was defended as follows by Robert Lindsey, one of the founding members of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research: There existed in the beginning a Hebrew biography of Jesus that was translated literally into Greek.[16]
    - Philippe Rolland's theory is based on four sources: A primitive Semitic gospel, two later versions of it, and Q.[17]
    - P. Benoit proposes that there was (1) an Aramaic S, which is a collection of Jesus sayings, (2) and an early Aramaic version of Matthew.[18]
    - Boismard's theory is based on a Palestinian proto-gospel hypothesis.

The Qur'ānic alternative surpasses those theories from other angles:

- Most theologians and scholars who are studying *the historical Jesus* today agree that Jesus was no more than an Israeli prophet.[19] That is

15 See Andrews Norton, *The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, Boston: J. B. Russell, 1837, 1/9

16 See Robert Lindsey, "A Modified Two-Document Theory of the Synoptic Dependence and Interdependence," in *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963), pp.239-63.

17 See Philippe Roland, *Les Premiers Évangiles, Un Nouveau Regard sur le Problème Synoptique*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1984

18 See P. Benoit, "Les Évangiles Synoptiques," in *La Bible de Jérusalem*, Paris, pp.1407-413.

19 John Hick, in his "*The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age*" (London:

a crucial truth that should lead us to deduce that Jesus, in all probability, had his own sacred book, as did many of the other great Israeli prophets.

- The term "gospel" was not used before the emergence of the New Testament as a religious term in the Jewish world. It is stated in the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* that "the distance between the Old Testament Jewish tradition and New Testament use of εὐαγγέλιον is considerable, particularly in view of the fact that the Hebrew and Greek nouns appear in neither the Masoretic Text nor the Septuagint with a theological meaning."[20]
- It is very likely that the title "gospel" was not used in the beginning to identify the first "gospels."[21] The first known author who called these writings "gospels" is Justin Martyr in the second century, and from his statement we can find that this word is a later denotation for one special type of the Christian scriptures. He said that what he calls "Memoirs of the Apostles" are called "gospels." He wrote in 1Apology 66.3, "In the memoirs which the apostles have composed which are called Gospels "ἃ εὐαγγέλια καλεῖται" they transmitted that they had received the following instructions..." In his dialogue with Trypho the Jew 10:2, he quoted Trypho as saying, "I know that your commandments which are written in the so-called gospel 'ἃ γέγραπται ἐν τῷ λεγομένῳ εὐαγγελίῳ' are so wonderful and so great that no human being can possibly fulfill them."
- The Qur'ān says:

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلاَّ بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ فَيُضِلُّ اللّهُ مَن يَشَاء وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاء وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ﴾

"We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to them. Now Allah leaves straying

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Westminster John Knox Press, ٢٠٠٦, p.٢٧) writes, "A further point of broad agreement among New Testament scholars [...] This is that the historical Jesus did not make the claim to deity that later Christian thought was to make for him: he did not understand himself to be God, or God the Son, incarnate. [...] such evidence as there is has led the historians of the period to conclude, with an impressive degree of unanimity, that Jesus did not claim to be God incarnate"

20 H. R. Balz and G. Schneider, eds. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, 2/71

21 See Helmut Koester, "From the Kerygma-Gospel to Written Gospels," in *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989), pp.361-81, for the fuller account of the arguments.

those whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases: and He is Exalted in power, full of Wisdom." Q. 14:4

So, the earliest source should be in the *lingua franca* of Jesus and his people, which is Aramaic (or perhaps Hebrew). Most of the other theories start with a supposed Greek text(s).

- We read in Matthew 26:13, "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever *this gospel* shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." (Mark 14:9). It is hard to not think that "this gospel" refers to a real text that the believers and the nonbelievers could read in Jesus' time.
- It is remarkable that Q contains only the sayings of Jesus, while we know that the sayings of other old and influential historical and mythical characters were circulating, as a whole, in stories and epics. We can say, based on the previous fact, that taking Q to be a primitive collection that is supposed to be a collection of divine commandments for guidance makes a lot of sense, especially in the Israeli prophetic tradition.
  To think, as many do, that the Greek Q document is an exact translation of an Aramaic text is hardly plausible; it is more reasonable to propose that the Greek Q is a text that contained part of the first Aramaic gospel through the oral tradition circulating in early times. Excluding the hypothesis of a direct translated Q from an Aramaic precedent is due to the absence of any serious sign of a Semitic autograph.[22] It is most probable to think that the *earliest tradition* was not transmitted to later generations and communities as a whole package of sayings or deeds, but that that tradition passed to future non-eyewitnesses through the eyes of influential religious characters and groups of their times, who included in their version only what reached them and what they felt to be valuable.

22 After an in-depth study, N. Turner concluded that Q language "offers appreciably from the typical translation Greek of which there are abundant examples in the Septuagint" ("Q in Recent Thought," in *Expository Times*, 80 (1969), p.326). And that "the Semitic element is not too pronounced in the sections of Matthew and Luke usually ascribed to Q, and no evidence demands a translation hypothesis" (p.328)

An Untold Story!

But how can we explain the absence of any reference to this gospel in ancient literature?

First: We can give a fully satisfactory answer to the previous question if we can enlighten the whole *obscure zone*. All that we know about the *obscure zone,* however, is only a few glimpses, so all that we can say about Jesus' Gospel is but the outline of its history.

Second: We are unable to draw the exact history of the four existing canonical gospels, so we would be, without a doubt, less successful in discovering the minute details of the period that preceded it.

Third: The absence of any mention of the divine gospel of Jesus is no stranger than the absence of the mention of Jesus himself in any historical, non-Christian, document of the first century.[23]

Fourth: The prologue to the Gospel of Luke tells us that in the early decades of the second half of the first century, many writings that tell Jesus' story did exist, but today we know nothing of those *well-known* writings. This tells us that when studying very early Christianity, we should not be tied too much to concrete documents, because that will lead to the loss of many attainable truths.

Fifth: We can say about Jesus' lost gospel what was said by John S. Kloppenborg, one of the most famous proponents of the existence of Q: "Q is neither a mysterious papyrus nor a parchment from stacks of uncataloged manuscripts in an old European library. It is a document whose existence we must assume in order to make sense of other features of the Gospels. […] Scholars did not invent Q out of a fascination for mysterious or lost documents. Q is posited from logical necessity." [24]

Why Must Scholars Go Beyond Q?

There are many solid reasons:

First: As shown by recent studies, Q is not a new document; it has its own history, as do the canonical gospels. It is a growing entity that starts from an early collection of existent materials that was circulating in the primitive Christians' communities after Jesus' disappearance, and was

23 See Earl Doherty, *Jesus Neither God Nor Man, the Case for a Mythical Jesus*, Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009, pp.503-656

24 John S. Kloppenborg, *Q, the Earliest Gospel, an Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus*, Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press. 2008, p.4

enlarged when more traditions were added to it. So we have to get to its very beginning to reach the fountain of Jesus' message.[25]

Second: The astonishing diversity of the traditions circulating in the early Christian communities leads us to consider that there was possibly an early corruption that started soon after Jesus' ascension or possibly before that. Such corruption would make it unwise to take the common texts of Matthew and Luke as the earliest Jesus tradition or conflated tradition. We should accept two hypotheses: (1) an early wave of corruption; (2) Q does not represent the entire, true early tradition.[26]

Third: Q fails to offer a whole picture of the message of Jesus; it fails to show Jesus as an Israeli prophet sent with a dynamic earthly message. Jesus of Q is minimized to an eschatological prophet,[27] or a sapiential sage.[28] He lost much of what we would expect from such an influential figure, because, in accord with the traditions of the nation of Israel, rules of daily life are an essential component of the message of the prophet or reformer, even one who is concerned about heralding the end of time.[29]

We can conclude by stating that Christians lost Jesus' gospel in the darkness of the first half of the first century, within a short time after his ascension, and then they lost the autographs of the New Testament as soon as these books were written. It is one of the grievous tragedies of history.

25 See Marcus J. Borg, *The Lost Gospel Q: The Original Sayings of Jesus*, Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 1996

26 Even John S. Kloppenborg states, "It is illegitimate, therefore, to argue from silence that what is not in Q was not known to the editors or, still less, that what is not in Q cannot be ascribed to Jesus." John S. Kloppenborg, "The Sayings of Gospel Q and the Quest of the Historical Jesus," in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (Oct., 1996), p. 330

27 See John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: rethinking the historical Jesus*, II, New York: Doubleday, 2004; Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999

28 See Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994

29 Such as the Essenes; see Joseph M. Baumgarten (tr. Christophe Batsch), "La Loi Religieuse de la Communauté de Qoumrân," in *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales,* 51e Année, No 5 (Sep. Oct., 1996), pp.1005-025

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